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THE A/EFFECTS OF IMPLICIT BIAS ON THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF BLACK
STUDENTS ATTENDING URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE NORTHEASTERN
REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation Presented
by
NADINE R. O'GARRO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2020

Urban Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies Program

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ABSTRACT

THE A/EFFECTS OF IMPLICIT BIAS ON THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING AN URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL IN THE NORTHEASTERN REGION OF THE UNITED STATES

May 2020

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The history of racism in the United States is so ingrained in American culture that it has become normalized. This is true even in education. Despite well-documented reports that Black students are being subjectively and harshly disciplined for minor in-school infractions, there is resistance to discussing how teachers are not being prepared to teach in culturally responsive ways. This study sought to shed light on how the impacts of institutionalized racism, manifesting as racial microaggressions and implicit biases, are adversely impacting the classroom learning experiences of Black students in middle and high schools. The

findings reveal that the root of the problem exists in teacher preparation. Despite a largely white teaching force and a growing majority of students of color, teachers are not being prepared to deal with their own implicit biases and how these biases impact their students' learning outcomes, thereby unintentionally preserving the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers. This research concludes with a call to action on the part of teacher educators to revise course work to include exercises that will help teachers confront their biases, disrupt the deficit narrative of the students they teach, and learn culturally responsive teaching pedagogy.

DEDICATION

To my son. I went into education because of you. When I couldn't find a "just right" school for you and had to settle, I remember thinking "What about all the other children and families who are having to settle? Where are the schools for little Black boys and girls who just want to learn and be cared for?" I decided then that I would become a part of the solution instead of just complaining about the problem.

Matt, over the years we have changed schools multiple times in search of a school that would see YOU, your big heart and curious mind, and help to cultivate it. We have had some good experiences, but not as many as you deserved. I am in education because I hoped to be the teacher that every child deserves, even if for only one school year. This PhD is for you, son, for you and every child I have ever taught.

To all of my babies, we will figure this out, we will do better. Please hold us accountable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

~ Her, Him, You, and Me ~

I remember sitting in Professor Harris and Professor Holland's Summer 2010 course Leadership Development. The first question they asked us was "Why are you here?" Still a bit unsure of myself, I remember the relief I felt when Professor Holland called on someone on the far side of the room to share (out loud). In a class of 15 that summer, I had about 9 people ahead of me before it would be my turn to answer. As I listened, I heard quick and confident answers such as, "I'm a life long learner, this is just the next step for me, a terminal degree," and "My wife just completed her PhD. It's my turn," and "I have aspirations of being a superintendent one day." When there were two people ahead of me I realized I might be in the wrong place. I am a first-generation college student. My mom pursued her bachelor's and master's degrees after raising three children and two grandchildren. I was sitting in this class because of her.

~HER~ In early 2010, maybe January, I do not recall, my mom asked me to attend an education fair at Campus Center, UMass Boston. I told her "no, thanks" then she said there would be pizza and really she just needed me there for company. I reluctantly accompanied her (for the pizza). I was not at all curious about anything the education fair had to offer, except the pizza. When we arrived, I made a beeline for the pizza and my mom went off to check out the various information tables of program offerings. Soon I was beckoned over to the Education Department area (by texts and a few missed calls from my mom). Again,

reluctantly I made my way over and with annoyance asked, “How can I help you, Mom?” My mom wanted me to listen in as a representative described the program. After less than half listening I asked my mom again, “But how can I help you?” “Oh, Nadine,” she responded, with way too much patience, because I really was being a brat. “Just listen and tell me what you think.” Here is what I was thinking: You are a police officer. Why are you speaking with people in education? Shouldn’t you be speaking with a representative in Criminal Justice? Instead of sharing my thoughts, I rolled my eyes in full brat mode, leaned in, and asked the representative a question. I don’t remember the question, but I think it had something to do with the difference between a PhD and a doctorate. Fast forward.

My mom picked up a few brochures that night from the education tables, and three slices later we left. The very next morning, while at work, I opened my email to find a message from my mom. *I want you to help me fill out this application. I am going to apply for the doctoral program.* What! How could I help? I was coasting through my fifth year of teaching and didn’t want or need those problems. My mom would not take no for an answer. And here is where it gets interesting. After looking over the application, my mom decided we needed to fill the thing out together, i.e., I complete an application as she is completing her application so that we could talk through the parts she was not clear about. What!?! There was no use protesting. My mom is patient, but she is not one to be turned down or away. And so over the following days, she and I completed our applications. When it was time for her to reach out to people for a recommendation, I thought my job was done. Instead, she said, “You might as well go ahead and submit the application, you’ve already completed the hard parts.” What!?! I should have known, but I didn’t: I was being set up.

My mom and I submitted our applications together sometime in March of 2010. Sometime later I was invited in for an interview facilitated by Tricia Kress. My mom hadn't gotten a call, and with relief that it was over, I moved on with my life. In May, on my birthday, on my drive into work I remember having a mild panic attack. It was my thirtieth birthday. I did not own my own home. I was not married. And I wasn't ready to get older. I didn't feel older; I felt like I was floundering. I cried myself in to work and was stopped by the gym teacher, who, when I told her why I was upset, laughed at me, gave me a hug, and suggested I wash my face before my students arrived. I did. All pulled together and ready to start yet another day of teaching and learning (I love teaching), I began to transform for my students into the happy ready-to-go teacher they expect. Just as the day was about to get started, I got a call, which was very odd, because it was very early in the morning, and no one calls me when I'm at work (except my mom). It was Tricia. Tricia Kress was calling to inform me that I had been accepted into the program, that an email had been sent a few days ago, but I hadn't responded and so she was calling to follow up. What??? I had just cried myself into work, I had completely forgotten about this "opportunity" that I was never even interested in and "Yes! Yes! I accept! Thank you, thank you so much! I will check my email. Thank you for following up." And just like that, I began this journey.

When it was finally my turn, with Dr. Harris's, Dr. Holland's, and the entire class's attention, I answered, "I'm not quite sure why I'm here yet. I do know that my mom tricked me into applying and so here I am." Mami, muchisimas gracias, por todo. Te amo mucho!

~HIM~ He is why I am even in education. Matthews, my son, is the reason I became a teacher. I remember panicking when I realized I would not be able to homeschool him,

when I realized I would have to send him out into this cold and mean world where Black boys are viewed with suspicion, seen as adults, and criminalized without cause. And here I was, with no choice but to send him out into the world, and there was nothing I could do but trust (myself) that everything would work out for the best. Things did not work out for the best. By October of my son's kindergarten year, I received a letter that he was going to be seen by the school psychiatrist. WHAT!!! ... and for the longest time my son and I have been fighting for just and equal treatment, for him to be seen as a child, to be treated as a child, to be supported through the normal developmentally appropriate challenges that all children grow through. Except. He is a Black boy, in a cold and mean world. In 2006 I was a brand new teacher and a very active and involved parent. But this did not matter. My education, my experience as Matthews' mom, my desire to partner with his teacher were not valued, were not wanted. Five schools! My son attended five schools. I am going to write a book one day about that experience, but suffice it to say, I knew how hard it would be, sending my little Black boy out into this cold and mean world that views Black males as criminals. I just didn't know how pain-filled this journey would be, and still is. We did have a few good experiences, one of which included the year I decided that Matt would attend the school I was teaching at. When Matt was 12 years old, he was my 7th grade math student. It was the best school experience he and I have ever had! I had my child close to me every day for two years. He was still his developmentally rambunctious self and I got to experience what all the hyper-focused fuss had been—my child is a nonconformist. He is years ahead of his time, very bright, and he understands things very quickly, not just academics, but the subtle inconsistencies that often go unnoticed by young people and even adults. Once he has figured

something out, he decides if it's positive or negative and then engages accordingly. As Matt matriculated through school, kindergarten through 10th grade, he engaged less and less. In January of his 10th grade year, Matt told me he had had enough. He wanted to be homeschooled. And so I did. Matt completed his 10th grade year with me as his learning facilitator. He built a garden from scratch in the backyard, completed a Black history curriculum, and passed all of his academic subject courses. Today he is working his way through a vocational training and GED program (completed Dec.21, 2019!). I knew this solo parenting journey would be challenging. I knew it would be hard. I did not know how pain-filled it would be to send my child to school, and I have never felt more relieved than I did in Matt's 10th grade year that he was no longer experiencing the torture of being out in the cold and mean world called school that views Black boys as a problem. Matthews, baby boy, my sun and my moon, thank you. Thank you for your perseverance. Thank you for advocating for yourself. Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for your forgiveness as I stumbled, tripped, and fell on this impossible journey as your biggest advocate. Thank you mi morenito, te amo.

~YOU~ I could not have done this without you. Cohort 2010, so many of you still reach out to me, sending me words of encouragement, sharing advice, even verbally kicking me in the pants when I even joked about quitting. Thank you! And to all of the cohorts that have adopted me into their family as I audited classes for the structure and accountability and support: Thank you! To all of my professors from 2010 to 2020: Thank you! To my chair and co-chairs, Thank you! To my friends and family, you will never know how much your encouragement has meant to me over the years. Thank you! And You. You showed up under

a lamp post. Literally glowing. You came to hold up a mirror, hold me accountable, push me harder than I thought I could be pushed ... and I did not break. The last leg of this journey was filled with so many challenges and with You by my side, reminding me of where to put my focus, reminding me to stay focused, reminding me not to lose focus, I did it!

~ME~ To me. Girlfriend, we did it. That shhhhh was HARD and we did it. Thank you for believing, thank you for pushing through, thank you for crying it out but never giving up. I owe you a much-needed tropical vacation. Thank you Queen, you are everything to me and more. I am so proud of Me.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this introduction is to create a picture of why this study is so important. Included is a personal account of my classroom learning experiences, a brief introduction to what the literature says about Black student achievement, a brief overview of race and racism in America, a problem statement and the purpose and rationale for the study, the research questions, theoretical framework, and the study significance. These are the main components of the dissertation and how I came to the conclusion that the discourse on academic achievement will continue to miss the intended mark of closing the “achievement gap” between Black students and their white peers, because implicit bias, prejudice, and racism are not a part of the conversation.

My Classroom Learning Experiences

I am a first-generation American, a Black woman of Caribbean and Hispanic descent. My parents immigrated to the United States (US) in their adolescence, my mother from the Republic of Panama and my father from Montserrat in the West Indies. From the first grade through high school graduation, I attended public school in a suburb of Boston that voluntarily hosts a school integration program. School integration programs were created in the mid through late 1960s as a way to comply with desegregation mandates that resulted from the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision that separate schools for white children and Black children were “inherently unequal.” The school integration program I was a part of complied with the mandate by busing students of color from their predominantly

Black and Brown neighborhood schools in Boston to a predominantly white school in a nearby suburban town.

When I was in the seventh grade, my mother noticed that the work I brought home was not at all challenging. I was putting in very little effort or time and maintaining an “A” average. When my mother inquired with school administrators about the ease with which I was able to complete my work, she learned that I had been placed on a level three track. Level three was the second-lowest of four levels, where level one was honors and level four was designated for students with learning and adaptive behavior challenges. Administrators noted that no specific tests had been administered to determine my placement. Since there did not appear to be justification for the seemingly arbitrary placement, my mother insisted that I be moved into level one courses the following semester.

Arbitrarily assigning students to educational tracks is a common practice in schools (Oakes, 2005). From my experience as an educator, parent, and teacher, this action speaks to the perceptions educators have of students, which are sometimes based on information provided by former teachers or school records, standardized assessments, socioeconomic status, and/ or race. Since I was not tested prior to placement and our family’s socioeconomic status, based on my mother’s earnings, placed us in the upper middle class, I assume that information from previous teachers and/or my race were the factors used to place me on the level three academic track.

My educational experience and the classroom experiences of other Black students are not unique, due to the history of racism in the US. When I refer to Black students I am referring to all students from the African diaspora, for example, Central America, the Caribbean, South America, and every other place in the world where African people were

moved or have moved to. Unlike students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, the skin color of Black students has been attached to inferiority since the days of chattel slavery. For this group of students, the implicit biases of teachers due to their phenotype may result in lowered academic and behavioral expectations. Researchers have demonstrated that teacher perceptions of students have an impact on teachers' decision making regarding student placement in academic programs. For example, in "A Teacher Expectation Intervention: Modelling the Practices of High Expectation Teachers," Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Sibley, and Rosenthal (2015) showed that "students of teachers who were trained in the practices of high expectation had increases in their math scores" representative of three additional months of an academic school year, when compared to the control group (p. 81). Studies such as these highlight what is possible for students when teachers shift their mindset. However, for Black students, what is possible is a bit more complicated because a teacher's mind shift regarding expectations is influenced by the implicit biases they subconsciously have towards people of color, and Black people particularly.

In my level three classes I learned early and quickly that teachers never called home about my behavior. Instead, they pleaded with me to use my energy and intelligence for good. Due to the lack of academic rigor, I was bored and struggled behaviorally, often calling out answers, getting out of my seat, walking around the class without permission, and generally being a disruption. It is important to note here that the problem was my boredom, not a learning gap, cognitive challenges (Oakes, 2005), or the attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders that are often cited in the research. In hindsight, I realize I was getting away with being disruptive because of my teachers' low academic and behavior expectations of me. I was maintaining an "A" average with no effort, but my teachers never thought to

transfer me into classes that were more challenging. In my level three classes I recall feeling very confident about my academic abilities, but I had a very different experience once I transferred into honors classes the following semester.

From the second half of seventh grade through high school, my behavior was never an issue again. The work was challenging, and I had to pay attention in order to do well. On my first day in honors history, I was placed in the back center of the room with a dismissive finger wag. There was an uneasiness in the room, and although I was sure some of the uneasiness was related to my being added to advanced classes in the middle of the school year, as the only Black student in that class and all of my other classes, I also sensed differential treatment and slights. In honors history I was rarely called on. On several occasions I was publicly shamed for not knowing things that I “should know,” even though I was starting the class halfway through the year. It was at this time that I first remember feeling both incompetent and invisible, and I was sure this sentiment was related to how I was being treated. Nevertheless, in spite of the challenges of transferring to honors halfway through the year, I did very well academically. Socially I was isolated. I did not have any friends in my honors classes and only saw my Black friends at lunch.

When I matriculated to high school, my mother had to assert herself yet again to ensure I was enrolled in honors courses. My ninth-grade computer science teacher, a white male, made clear that he would not slow down his lessons or take any extra time to help me because my mother was “wrong to think I could be successful in honors courses.” Since the classroom was filled with mostly Asian and white males, I could only assume that he thought a Black female could not do well in his class. The class was very hard, I was not getting any help, and I could not bear the public humiliation of failing. Facing the threat of confirming

my teacher's low expectations of me, as an act of survival I chose to flee rather than fight (Steele & Aronson, 1995). I dropped the computer science course before the end of the first semester.

As one final example of the differential treatment I experienced as the only Black student in my classes, in one of my high school English courses we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Despite the harsh race relations of the time period and derogatory language used in these books, the teacher did not facilitate a pre-reading discussion or set the tone for how each student was expected to interact with the text. This resulted in students laughing and making inappropriate jokes about demeaning scenes and dehumanized characters, which the teacher did not correct. As I had learned in my middle school honors class, it was not uncommon to be made to feel invisible one moment and then put upon the next to share insight about "the Black experience" during slavery or Jim Crow, as the only Black student in the classroom. There are still instances in elementary through higher education where classroom instructors lack the cultural competence or sensitivity to thoughtfully facilitate discussions around race and racism; conversations either take place haphazardly or not at all.

The behavior I have described of being put down, overlooked, dismissed, or thought of as incapable, which were daily experiences for me, are known as racial microaggressions, a term coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s (Carroll, 1998). Racial microaggressions are the subtle everyday assaults, insults, and invalidations that people of color experience (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). As a middle school and high school student, I was aware that my teachers and peers thought less of me because of the color of my skin, but I did not have the language to describe their microaggressions or confront them. Instead I chose to keep my

head down and be silent. In classes where I did not feel I was being treated fairly, I took a passive aggressive position, completing just enough work to pass but not much more. There is no doubt in my mind that I could have done better had there been an expectation for me to do well and had I felt a part of my classes, but the burden of being treated unfairly was too great. It is this experience that inspired me to explore the impacts of racism's residue—prejudice, discrimination, implicit bias, and racial microaggressions—on the classroom learning experiences of Black students, and their subsequent academic (under)achievement.

Black Student Achievement

For decades, research into the underachievement of Black students has been undertaken in an attempt to better understand and remedy the academic achievement gap phenomenon. However, much of the research has been “damage centered” (Tuck, 2009). The findings of many of the existing studies point to broken homes, poor communities, single-parent households, underfunded schools, inexperienced and transient teachers, unmotivated students, learning gaps that exist even before students begin kindergarten, and so on, as the causes of Black students' underachievement. The focus of this work will be different because the impact of racialized discrimination will be central to the discussion regarding the underachievement of Black students, which is a symptom of a larger problem: contemporary racism.

Thanks to required record keeping via the No Child Left Behind Act and the more recent Every Student Succeeds Act, the nationwide phenomenon of the racialized underachievement of Black students is well documented (Burris & Welner, 2005; Cuban, 1989; U. S. Department of Education, 2008). The phenomenon is observable across various

school settings in the US, but is most prominently discussed as a crisis occurring in urban public schools (Klinger, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006). It is my position that the source of this phenomenon is correlated with years of failing to recognize that the underachievement of Black students is a symptom of the larger problem of contemporary racism. Having evolved from centuries of legalized racial discrimination, contemporary racism is systemic and institutionalized. The term contemporary racism refers to white people in America being influenced both by implicit biases that are formed subconsciously through personal and vicarious experiences and by mass media, despite the earnest desire of many to avoid explicit racial thoughts and actions (Dovidio, 2014). According to Professor John Calmore (2007, as cited by Powell, 2007), “racism [is] being elided from dominant discussions about social justice and even from various discussions of race itself” (p. 793). However, I am asserting that when discussing the underachievement of Black students, regardless of socioeconomic status, marriage or career status of parents, or attendance in public, private, or parochial schools, racism and its far-reaching impacts must be a part of the discourse. In the next section I discuss ways in which the lives of Black people have been profoundly impacted by racism in the US.

Race and Education

In Signithia Fordham’s 1988 work “Racelessness as a Factor in Black Students’ School Success,” she asserts that “race is one of the most formidable obstacles in the lives of Black Americans” (p. 81). Fordham’s study looked closely at the experiences of Black students as they attempted to navigate the racially charged world they live in. According to Fordham, “ambivalence and conflict about academic effort appear to be at the center of

Black students' response to school and schooling” (p. 61). As a coping mechanism, she explains, “some take on attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics not necessarily attributed to Black Americans” (p. 58). Fordham and her colleague John Ogbu (1986) refer to a “hellish confusion” students face in an effort to cope with the disparaged economic and social conditions of Black Americans (p. 45). It is now 2019 and despite works that were published 30-plus years ago, the impacts of racism are still not central to the discourse on Black student academic achievement.

Historically, there has been a hyper focus on symptomatic aspects of the academic achievement gap, while little to no attention is being paid to the classroom learning experiences of Black students (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009; Cohen, Apfel, & Master, 2006; C. Smith, 2005; Wigfield & Eccles, 1998). The popular narrative regarding the achievement of Black students highlights factors that lead to the gap; however, the narrative rarely cites race, racism, discrimination, differential expectations, or implicit bias as critical factors impacting Black students’ learning experiences and achievement (Lewis & Kim, 2008; Noguera, 2008; D. Phillips, 1984; van den Berg, Denessen, Hornstra, & Voeten, 2010). The history of racism and discrimination in the US would suggest that there is a high probability Black students experience the classroom learning environment in very different ways than their white peers (Bryan, 2017). Studying these differential experiences would shed light on why the gap in academic achievement between Black and white students persists.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, public awareness of how deeply rooted racism is in the US has become more apparent due to civilian footage of law enforcement officers brutalizing or using deadly force when encountering Black people (Leonnig, 2014). And, despite video footage, the justice system continues to find officers not at fault for the senseless deaths of unarmed Black men, women, and children. The complacency of the justice system is comparable to the complacency of the education system. Law enforcement officers have been allowed to justify their use of deadly force if the officer “reasonably believes the subject poses a significant threat of serious bodily injury or death to themselves or others” (Leonnig, 2014, para. 2). Similarly, in public schools across the nation, the maltreatment of students of color has been allowed—until or unless there is public outcry for interventions. For example, in May 2017, a public charter school banned two Black students from school activities for refusing to adhere to dress code policy that bans hair extensions (Pattison-Gordon, 2017). In the Black community hair extensions are the preferred hair style because they protect the hair and aid students in preparing for school or work because the hair is already styled. These two students were sisters who were banned from the track team and softball team because they refused to remove their braids or serve detention. The girls had the full support of their parents, but the school took a rigid stance until pressure was applied by the Attorney General’s office to revise the discriminatory policy (Levenson, 2017). In other instances, Black students both male and female have been overdisciplined for nonviolent “offenses” such as talking back (Fine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Losen, Keith, Hodson, & Martinez, 2016). Public education districts across the country justify the failure of Black (and Hispanic) students, citing factors such as poor communities, uneducated parents, and unmotivated

students as being outside of the schools' control, while overlooking the in-school factors that create hostile learning environments for students. Both law enforcement and public education leaders are failing to acknowledge that the disproportionate rates at which Black people are disciplined in school, are failing academically, and are murdered by police are all connected to historical and present-day racism. I believe the ability to justify the “failure” and murder of Black people is in part attributable to a failure to address the pink elephant in the room: institutionalized endorsements of racism against Black people. Although there are other elephants in the room, such as differential treatment due to socioeconomic status, this work will solely focus on the educational experiences of Black students who are subjected to the implicit biases of a largely white teaching force. In the next section I discuss how interactions between Black students and their teachers are impacted by racism.

The far-reaching presence and cumulative impact

In the US racism is pervasive and perpetuated within many different social institutions, including education (Powell, 2007). Nearly everyone, including teachers, is subjected to a constant onslaught of media imagery that immortalizes the narrative that Black people are inferior. Whether the medium is news, sitcoms, commercials, newspapers, or textbooks, there is an onslaught of direct and indirect messaging that the white race is superior than all the other races and, more specifically, that the Black race is inherently inferior (Gilens, 1996). One example to consider is an overrepresentation of white people as married and Blacks as unmarried by subtly including a ring on the traditional “ring finger” or not in television commercials, such as in the Febreze or Sleep Number commercials. Another example is of the overrepresentation and perpetuation of the stereotype that Black people are committing crimes at disproportionate rates in comparison to their white

counterparts on the nightly news and in shows such as “Cops” and “CSI.” The cumulative impact of overrepresentation of Blacks and whites in roles such as these is a reinforcement of messages of racialized inferiority and superiority.

I focus on the media as a prime influence over people’s perceptions of one another to shed light on the incessant reinforcement of grossly inaccurate representations of both Black and white people that undoubtedly impact how people view and interact with one another. In 1996, Martin Gilens published his examination of media portrayals of the poor from 1950 to 1992 in “Race and Poverty in America: Public misperception and the American Media.” Gilens found that “African Americans have generally dominated the news media’s depictions of ‘the poor’ since the 1960s” (p. 531) and that poverty was disproportionately portrayed as a Black problem [by the news media] despite the fact that Blacks make up less than one-third of “the poor” (p. 532). Gilens asserts, “Media distortions of social conditions are therefore likely to result in public misperceptions that reinforce existing biases and stereotypes” (p. 535).

According to Joseph Murphy (2010),

Teachers’ expectations significantly shape their treatment of students. . . .

Different treatments routinely disadvantage low income students. . . . These

children consistently receive less favorable treatment. . . . These teachers

unwittingly perpetuate the achievement gap by failing to encourage students

to aim higher and take more demanding courses. (p. 164)

Similarly, teachers are not immune to the influence of the racialized negative portrayal of people of color. The widely viewed negative images and messages of Black people influence what teachers expect from their Black students both behaviorally and academically, as well

as how teachers interact with their Black students. According to Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, and Jacoby-Senghor (2016),

In a study examining millions of people (85% whom reside in the United States) . . . approximately 68% of respondents held pro-White / anti-Black implicit associations, with respondents' magnitude of bias tending to be medium to large (Nosek et al., 2007). The effect size remained constant even when the pictures [participants] responded to were of children. If teachers are like other adults in their implicit associations, we can expect a majority to hold medium to large negative implicit associations about Black children and adults. (p. 2)

Serious consideration about the impact of racism on classroom learning experiences of Black students is needed. Liou and Rotheram -Fuller (2016) assert that “in a supposed post-racial era where concerns for racism have diminished in the dominant discourse, it is important to examine why educational disparity has continued” (p. 2). Some studies have centralized the impact of race and racism on the educational experiences of Black students, but this literature has not received the acknowledgment necessary to influence education policy. Additionally, among the existing literature that centralizes racism, there is an absence of Black student voices to personalize their classroom learning experiences. Statistically, 84% of the public school teaching force is white (Hrabowski & Sanders, 2015); therefore, it can be assumed that the classroom learning experiences of Black students will predominantly take place in classrooms with white teachers. Additionally, racism, prejudice, and stereotypes impact the subconscious of all people; therefore, Black students can also experience racial microaggressions with teachers who are not white. For this study, the race of the teacher is

less significant than the expressed classroom learning experiences of Black students, as recounted by Black students.

In the classroom, students of color, and Black students in particular, are subjected to racial microaggressions at the hands of their teachers and peers. According to Huber and Solorzano (2014) the exchange has little to do with the intention of the perpetrator and everything to do with how the recipient experiences the slight or insult. Utilizing racial microaggressions as an analytical tool, this study seeks to investigate the impact of racism on classroom learning experiences by exposing the frequency at which Black students are subjected to micro assaults, micro insults, and micro invalidations in the classroom by both their teachers and peers. As a reminder, racial microaggressions are the subtle everyday assaults, insults, and invalidations that people of color experience (Carroll, 1998; Huber & Solorzano, 2014; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

In the US, racial microaggressions are rooted in this country's long history of blatant and legally sanctioned racism, racial discrimination, and stereotyping (Bell, 1992). Indelible marks of racism and racist beliefs have been left on the structures and institutions this country was founded upon. From healthcare to the legal system, housing, and education, racism impacts how people of color are treated (Bell, 1992; Cuban, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Oakes, 2005). Racial microaggressions are often subtle; however, it is my belief that the cumulative effects play a critical role and impact Black student classroom learning experiences and thus their academic achievement. The purpose of this study is to examine the role that racial microaggressions as a form of racism plays in the classroom learning

experiences of Black students and ultimately their educational achievement. Using the taxonomy of racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) as my analytical tool, I administered a survey to a racially and ethnically diverse group of student participants in order to compare the classroom learning experiences of Black students and their other-raced peers. This descriptive analysis was followed by small focus groups to provide Black student participants an opportunity to narrate their classroom learning experiences.

At the K–12 level, the academic achievement gap between Black and white students has not been examined in relation to the racial microaggressions that Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues Capodilupo and Holder (2008) uncovered in higher education and the everyday lives of people of color. Racial microaggressions assault, insult, and invalidate a person's self-concept and students at the K–12 level are experiencing these aggressions in silence. Due to the hyper focus on factors deemed to be outside of schools' control, the muted and cumulative micro insults, assaults, and invalidations are not being investigated as critical factors impacting the academic achievement of Black students. My work seeks to examine racial microaggressions in the 6-12 grade classroom, by hearing from the students most impacted. This perspective is a critical factor in helping educators better understand the academic achievement gap between Black students and their white peers beyond dominant factors such as family socioeconomic status and parents' level of education. The objective is to allow Black students to describe their classroom learning experiences with racial microaggressions so that educators and educators of educators can begin to reform K–12 teaching and learning towards antiracist pedagogy development to afford all students a more equitable opportunity to achieve without fear of being a witness to or victim of racial microaggression, thus creating a safer environment to learn in.

Rationale

The academic achievement gap has been the source of extensive discussion and decades of attempts at education reform. Reform efforts such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) have attempted to rectify the alarming trend that shows Black and Hispanic students underachieving at unacceptable levels, threatening to undermine the world-recognized leadership of the US (Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, these race-based comparisons are void of a contextual or historical account of Eurocentric ideology (Ladson-Billings, 2006), the model minority status of Asians (Lee, 2009) and the skin color disadvantage of Blacks and Hispanics (McIntosh, 1988). The academic achievement gap, as measured by standardized assessments, draws attention to an alarming trend in the history of public education in the US, which is the failure to educate all students equitably. The discussion very well could point to the fact that, as demonstrated by “the education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006), Black students are actually doing comparatively well despite it having been less than a century since schools were desegregated, less than a century since segregation was unlawful, and less than two centuries since the end of slavery. Given that chattel slavery lasted nearly four hundred years and was followed by nearly a century of Jim Crow, an era that only ended in the 1960s, about 60 years ago, this accomplishment is significant. Sixty years is well within the range of the lifetime of classroom teachers and readers of this work. Yet the discourse fails to identify the significance of how little time has actually passed or how impactful nearly four hundred years of race-based maltreatment and discrimination have been.

In an era of high-stakes testing, shedding light on the historical underpinnings associated with the academic achievement of K–12 students may provide the insight and

direction needed to address the persistence of the gap more effectively. Institutional and structural racism are two such underpinnings, and this study places race at the center of the discussion, connecting the impact of racism to the educational experiences of Black students.

Public education across the nation has always been “inherently unequal,” as U. S. Courts (1954) pointed out 65 years ago, and 30 years later it was deemed “at risk” (Gardner, 1983) of never genuinely addressing the persistence of the academic achievement gap between Black and white students. Yet, the popular discourse does not centralize or discuss race, racism, or implicit biases when attempting to address the persistent academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers. Due to the subtleness of race-based slights and invalidation, I will use the taxonomy of racial microaggressions to provide language to understand the complexity of the interactions and exchanges between people of different racial backgrounds, specifically the interactions between white people and Black people. The emphasis here is on complexity because, as noted earlier, although 84% of the nation’s public school teaching force is white, racism, prejudice, discrimination, and implicit bias are not isolated interactions between white teachers and Black students. Racism is not an easy topic to discuss, especially in education, because discussing racism in the classroom clearly implicates teachers. However, this is a necessary step that must be considered in order to effect the changes needed to close the academic achievement gap.

The achievement gap (hereafter “the gap”) has predominantly been discussed as academic failure among groups of Black and Hispanic students, their families, their communities, and their teachers (Ravitch, 2010). Coded language, such as socioeconomic status (SES), attempts to blame family income that is at or below the poverty line as the reason for the gap (Cuban, 1989). SES also identifies the parent’s/guardian’s educational

attainment, or lack thereof, as a decisive factor contributing to and maintaining the gap (Epstein, 2001). A family's income is typically connected to the education level of parents/guardians. If the head of household did not graduate from high school or college, the family's yearly income can be predictably low. According to the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), family income is an important factor in predicting the likelihood of academic success or failure. Finally, single-parent households are also cited as a factor that contributes to the persistence of the gap. It is assumed that single-parent households have fewer financial resources than two-parent households, and that these households are less likely to be able to provide a safe environment in which to raise children and less able to provide structured and enriching extracurricular opportunities and/or overall supervision for their children, especially adolescents (Epstein, 2001). Although these factors are generally accepted as finite justifications at various levels in academic and policy circles, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) have already shown that the gap exists among Black students from wealthy families living in wealthy school districts at similar rates as Black students living at or below the poverty line. Therefore, it is the intention of this work to examine another factor: the impact of racism on perceived and received interactions between Black students and their variously raced teachers.

Research Questions

Racial microaggressions can be elusive because an exchange or interaction between people can be difficult to articulate. The "micro" in racial microaggressions speaks to the subtleness of the assaults. An example of this would be the soft bigotry of low academic expectations and a hyper vigilance on Black students' behavior, resulting in the acceptance of

subjective and excessive school discipline and normalizing of Black students' academic underachievement (Milner & Tenore, 2010). More on the additive or cumulative impact of subtle assaults, insults and invalidations will be discussed in the next chapter. In this study I have chosen to work with a group of racially diverse public school students for the quantitative phase of the research and a small group of Black students for the qualitative phase. I chose students in secondary school because they have had many years of classroom exchanges with teachers and tend to be willing to articulate their classroom learning experiences with content and the interactions amongst the themselves, their teachers and peers. The questions guiding this research are as follows: How do Black students attending school in and around a large urban school district in the northeastern region of the United States experience racial microaggressions in the classroom in comparison to their peers of other races? How do racial microaggressions influence the learning experiences and outcomes of Black students, from the perspective of Black students? When referring to Black students I am including all students who are racial identified as Black; Black American, Black African, Black Caribbean, etc.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In my quest to understand the far-reaching influence of racism on Black students attending school in an urban public school district, I am using critical race theory as my foundational framework. This theory places institutionalized racism at the forefront of discussions about race-based inequality and the injustices that people of color experience in the US across many institutions, including health care, the judicial system, housing, and education (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009). In the next chapter, I review the major

principles of critical race theory and how it has informed studies in urban education. I also review those studies on the academic achievement of Black students that I used to inform this study.

Significance of the Study

It is my belief that most people, including educational leaders, communities, and families, are under the impression that classroom interactions between students and teachers are free from harmful stereotypes, prejudice, and racism. Unfortunately, educational spaces are not immune to the uniquely treacherous race relations between Black people and white people here in the US perpetuated by the media. The influence of racism is far-reaching and must be examined within K–12 education in order to reform classroom pedagogical practices that may help to effectively address the persistent gap in academic achievement between Black students and their white peers.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 has provided the background and context for this dissertation, by highlighting the persistence of the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers across all economic backgrounds and school types; despite decades of reform. Also included in chapter 1 was a brief review of the literature relevant to this study, the rationale, and the research questions. In the next chapter, a more in-depth review of the literature will be presented to further demonstrate that race and racism are missing from the achievement gap discourse. Chapter 2 will include a review of critical race theory, expectation theory as well as a review of the literature on racial microaggression, racial battle fatigue and implicit bias. In Chapter 3 the research method and rationale for a two-phase

sequential mixed methods approach will be discussed, including a detailed description of the two phases of this study the online survey and focus group. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative findings of this sequential mixed methods study related to students' classroom learning experiences. In chapter 5 a discussion of the findings, implications, and limitations of this study will be presented. This will include the interpreted the results of the analyzed data tied back to the literature. Chapter 5 will also offer recommendations for future research. The chapter will end with final remarks.

Conclusion

The gap in academic achievement between Black and white students enrolled in public school in the US is a phenomenon because it exists and persists in districts across the country, regardless of a school district's wealth, the abundance of resources, or the educational attainment of parents. I am interested in analyzing the experiences of Black students attending public school in school districts in and near Boston. I utilize a mixed methods approach that takes a close look at the role of institutionalized racism and implicit bias on the learning experiences of Black student participants via student surveys and student focus groups. In order to describe and categorize the types and frequency of racial microaggression students experience in the classroom, in the first phase of this mixed methods study I conducted a survey among 6th through 12th grade students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds available. In the second phase of the study, Black students who participated in the survey were invited to take part in one of several focus group discussions to provide additional qualitative insight into their classroom learning experiences and their academic success.

To afford a better understanding of the experiences of Black students in their urban school settings, the next chapter provides an overview of the popular research on the academic achievement of Black students. Critical race theory is my theoretical framework; a selection of this body of literature as well as studies that centralize the impacts of race and racism in education are also reviewed. My review of the literature provides an opportunity to demonstrate the contribution this study will make towards understanding the complexity of Black students' classroom learning experiences and the hidden factors that contribute to their academic underachievement.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction: Racism in the United States

The fabric of American culture has been stained with a brutal and unrelenting history of racism and discrimination. These stains permeate every American institution—judicial, healthcare, housing, and education. While it may appear that these stains are impossible to remove (Bell, 1992), with regard to public education and what is taking place in classrooms across the nation, I believe change is possible. As with any stain, it is critical to first identify what substance one is dealing with before attempting any treatment. In education, the stain I am identifying is the impact of the history of racism in America on the learning outcomes of Black students. Many topical treatments have been used to remedy the underachievement of Black students, including mandatory standardized testing for students attending schools that received federal funds, state and district student progress monitoring and school closure for schools that are deemed to be chronically failing to raise students' academic achievement as measured by state tests. However, these reforms have only served to penalize the very students they were designed to serve. As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) posits, a more appropriate classification for the achievement gap is “an education debt.” As she explains, everything that has been permitted to happen to Black people in order to provide an economic benefit to those in power has created an education debt with cumulative effects, such as the disparities that are evident in the disproportionate rates of Black men in prison, generational poverty, and the underachievement of Black children. Without a proper

understanding of the stain of racism, the education debt has been incorrectly framed as an achievement gap, and a misidentified stain incorrectly treated can appear to be indelible.

The long history of racism in the US has led to unfair prejudgments, stereotypes, prejudice, and misunderstandings. This long history coupled with the negative portrayal of people of color perpetuated by the media substantiates inaccurate narratives and makes it easier for failure, such as the failure of Black children to be normalized and accepted. It is the misrepresentation, incorrect framing and silenced self-narratives that critical race theorists boldly expose and explicitly show how the history of racism in the US is directly linked to the present-day challenges people of color continue to face in healthcare, housing, the legal system, and education. For example, in healthcare Black women frequently do not receive the same level of care due to the perception that they have a higher pain tolerance and thus do not need same kind of care that a white woman would typically receive. This belief stems from the non-anesthesia experimentation that Black women endured during the enslavement period to advance the field of obstetrics and gynecology (Washington, 2006). In housing, Black families are still more concentrated in the cities and the high crime areas that are typically associated with densely populated areas. This practice stems from government sanctioned housing discrimination such as redlining and denial of housing subsidies such as those afforded to white military service men that allowed them to move out of the city to the suburbs (Rothsetin, 2017). In the legal system, Black people receive harsher sentences for crimes their white counterparts also commit but are afforded more leniency. This stems from the history and practice of viewing Blacks as chattel and therefore without same constitutional rights and protection afforded their white counterparts prior to and even after the 14th amendments as evidence by the continuation of the over-incarceration of Blacks

(Alexander, 2010). These social inequalities, limited access to quality healthcare, housing, and education are examples of institutionalized and structural forms of racism that have become normalized and thus misunderstood and undisputed by mainstream America (Williams, 1999). The media's negative portrayal of people of color fuels and spreads fictional stereotypes that Black people are lazy, more prone to violence and criminal behavior, racializing the nation's social ills as disproportionately and primarily Black and Hispanic issues, while silencing concerns among and about Native American and Asian communities, for example, and promulgating racism (Avery & Peffley, 2003; Gilens, 1996).

Implicit Bias

What is meant by implicit bias is that the “isms” that feed stereotypes about groups of people have become normalized in such a way that most people are unaware of the prejudices they harbor, for example, that Asian students are academically superior to other racialized groups or that Black students are presumed to be at an academic deficit until proven otherwise (Lee, 2009). Racialized implicit biases are fueled by racist stereotypes and unchecked prejudices. I assert that for Black students in education, unchecked biases manifest as discriminatory teacher expectations. Over forty years ago, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) initiated research that focused on the impact of teacher expectation on the academic achievement, stagnation or regression of their students. In this empirical work, Rosenthal and Jacobson identified a direct correlation between the learning outcomes of students as dependent on the teacher's expectations. It is important to note here, but will be discussed in more detail later, that in Rosenthal and Jacobson's study the teacher's expectation was easily influenced by telling said teacher that they were teaching a class of

high-achieving or low-achieving students. Student learning increased among the students identified as high achieving. What then can be said of teachers who are indoctrinated by the daily onslaught of media images and messaging that Black people are inferior, incompetent, and prone to violence? As evidenced by the disproportionately high rates of harsh disciplinary action for students of color compared to their white peers for the same types of infractions (Nance, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999), as well as disproportionate special education placement or emotionally impaired designations in comparison to the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and advanced placement courses (Blanchett, 2006), classroom teachers are evidently not immune to biased expectations of their Black students. In classrooms where racial bias is left unchecked, there is a lack of awareness of the talents and abilities that Black students poses and a hyper focus on maintaining control of Black student bodies. This lack of awareness results in the watering down of curriculum and avoidance rigorous pedagogy in order to maintain control (Milner & Tenore, 2010).

Very few Americans understand how social and economic disparities between Black people and white people began, or the places in American history where these disparities were fortified by way of government sanctioned legislation and the reinforcement of public perception through the media (Gilens, 1996). One way misunderstandings about racial, social, and economic disparities are perpetuated is implicitly through the media. Implicit biases are “unconscious associations that do not necessarily align with one’s conscious beliefs” (Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Contractor, 2015). Unfortunately, because our associations “are so well established” by outside forces such as the media, our experiences, and societal norms, implicit biases “are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control” (Staats et al., 2015). In education, implicit biases are

problematic because they influence educator perceptions of students' cognitive abilities and therefore their expectations of students. An additional example of the implicit biases that teachers commonly harbor of their Black students is a generalized assumption that their parents are uninvolved or incapable of supporting their child's academic success. This is evidenced by the acceptance and complacency regarding the absence of Black parents in schools; unless it's for a suspension hearing or other behavioral concern (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Instead of a home/school partnership that would support the academic achievement of Black students' academic achievement and their social emotional growth there is a hyper focus on the students' behavior and this is primarily the only time parents are asked to be involved in their child's schooling (not education). These baseless perceptions and lowered expectations impact students' learning experiences. As Jason Nance (2016) explains, "implicit biases are caused by the racial biases of teachers and administrators, which manifest principally in unconscious forms" (p. 1068). It is highly likely that Black students are experiencing implicit race-based biases in their classrooms taught by a national teaching force that is nearly all white and female (Bryan, 2017). According to Nance (2016), implicit biases "function automatically and often in ways that a person would not explicitly endorse if the person was consciously aware of the biases" (p. 1069). One definition of bias is a prejudice in favor or against one thing, person or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair (Staats et al., 2015).

For many Black youth, after being raised in and by their Black families and in Black communities, entering the public school system introduces them to their first encounters with racism and racial bias. However, once they enter classrooms where teachers unchecked "isms" are permitted to influence their expectations of and interactions with their Black

students, Black students become the chief burden bearers of their teachers' implicit biases. Implicit bias not only influences teacher perceptions of students' abilities but also students' beliefs about their own abilities. For example, students are keenly aware of and impacted by their teachers' explicit and implicit expectations, there is empirical data that shows students' motivation and achievement are directly correlated with their perception of their teacher's belief and expectations (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rubie-Davies et al., 2015). Teacher expectation will be discussed in a later section, but it is important to note now that there is empirical evidence that students' performance is directly impacted by their perception of their teacher's belief in their abilities (Rubie-Davies et al., 2015). Students who do not perceive and directly experience that their teacher believes in them perform worse than they would if they had a teacher who believed in their ability and held them to high expectations. Poor academic performance of Black students in school is a symptom of low expectations (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

A major focus of Ford, Grantham, and Whiting's work in "Another Look at the Achievement Gap" (2008) was the underperformance of Black students. What this study suggests is that along with an achievement gap, there is a difference between attitude and achievement among Black and white students. As noted in the study, Black students tend to "believe [attitude] getting an education is important and valuable for success in life; however, the same students report they do not put forth much effort" (p. 220). In addition, Black students believe [attitude] that "hard work plays a major role in one's success"; however, they also believe that "hard work does not necessarily result in success if one is Black because of such social injustices as prejudice and discrimination" (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). The learning experiences of many Black students attending public school

include being unjustly labeled incapable and lowered expectations by teachers in large part because of the color of their skin. These students are then further labeled “unmotivated, lazy,” or even “deviant” when their behaviors match their teachers’ expectations however, from my personal experience, as well as the existing literature (Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005), the classroom learning experience for Black students are riddled with subtle injustices that in no small way negatively impact students’ academic achievement.

The Deficit Narrative

Black student achievement has been studied in a multitude of ways, personal, familial and environmental, to understand why the academic achievement gap persists. For example, some studies have focused on the student-related reasons for academic underachievement such as school readiness by kindergarten, innate cognitive abilities, or internal motivation and drive (Walker, 2000; Wigfield & Eccles, 1998). Black student underachievement has also been studied through the lens of familial causes such as family socio-economics and parents’ level of education (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2009; Jeynes, 2007). Black students’ underachievement has also been studied through the lens of environmental factors such as growing up in communities that are crime ridden and trauma inducing (Taylor & Covington, 1993). However, most of the studies that I have reviewed take a damage-centered or deficit approach to “understanding” why it is that Black students are not achieving at the same level as their white counterparts. In “Yo Mama’s Dysfunctional,” Robin Kelley (1997) refers to “a group of well-meaning liberal social scientists . . . [who] conceived of Black urban culture in the singular [and] opened the door for the invention of the “underclass” (p. 9). Kelley’s assertion is more than 20 years older than the works being reviewed here, and it is sadly still

relevant. The trend I found among the existing body of literature on the academic achievement of Black students can best be categorized as dichotomous. On the one hand, there is literature written critically that directly identifies how race and racism play a significant role on the academic underachievement of Black students. I will discuss this literature later in the section. This more critical literature could be instrumental in helping policy makers and all stakeholders in education address the persistent gap in achievement between Black students and their white peers, however this literature is relegated to the background. The more popular and prominently positioned literature on Black students' academic achievement, which does not centralize race and racism but has been allowed to influence education policy and ineffective reforms for decades (Harris & Herrington, 2006). This tendency is yet another example of the silencing, invalidation and paternalizing of the experiences of Black people as subjects to be studied by others but not capable of telling their own story (Tuck, 2009). However, the popularized works, conducted by outsiders, misidentify symptoms of historical racism as causes of the academic achievement gap instead of centralizing the history of racism as the cause. In the next section I will discuss the popularized deficit themes: parent/family deficits, unprepared and unmotivated students, and school factors such poorly funded schools and unqualified teachers.

The family deficit narrative

The media's negative portrayal of the Black family perpetuates the belief that Black adults and children are crime prone, drug addicted, and violent. Alice Goffman, in her 2014 bestselling ethnography *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, reveals that over the course of her six-year ethnographic work she completely immersed herself in the lives of the young Black men who were participants in her study impact of the "War on Crime" on the

lives of Black families; she even became roommates with a few of her participants (p. 240) which provided a firsthand(ish) experience into their day-to-day living. Her descriptions of the families of her research subjects, their lives, and the crimes these young men committed are seemingly necessary, but nonetheless they perpetuate the negative portrayal and narrative of Black people as a group and Black youth in particular. For example, of the many details Goffman could have focused on to describe the community and its members who hosted her, she describes Chuck “as working for the local dealer,” Reggie, Chuck’s brother, as “in and out of juvenile detention centers” with such frequency that his younger brother Tim “doesn’t really know him,” and their mother, Ms. Linda, as having a “heavy crack habit” and unable to keep a job “for more than a few months as a time” (p. 10). Goffman’s robust descriptions are true in form to ethnography but damaging and debilitating to the already negative image of the Black family. Goffman’s work seemed to genuinely attempt to uncover a hidden if not justifiable logic for the criminal involvement of these youths, as an act of survival in a system wrought with the snares and traps of a hunter. Nevertheless, similar to Eve Tuck (2009) I question “whether the benefits [of Goffman’s work] will outweigh the costs” (p. 410). In 2003, Avery and Peffley called attention to recent research that shows that “news coverage affects public opinion through a variety of more subtle pathways.” These more subtle a/effects include “the amount of attention the media devotes to an issue or event [and the fact that this amount of time and attention] affects the public’s priorities. The race of an individual pictured in the news is a salient and powerful cue and affects public opinion (Avery & Peffley, 2003, p.3). Works like Goffman’s and others, whose contributions to the narrative on Black families, riddled with descriptions of poverty and despair, are damage centered and damaging and give credence to discourse that hyper focuses on Black families

and students as a lost cause in addressing the persistence of the gap in academic achievement between Black and white students.

In a study conducted by Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2009), researchers examined the achievement gap between white students and students from other racial and ethnic groups. The findings of existing literature were confirmed; namely, that the Black-white gap is “sizeable and robust” (p. 398). This study also emphasized a theme among the popular body of literature that says family economics play a significant role in student achievement, much more so than school quality, and account for a large part of the Black-white gap (Clotfelter et al., 2009). Confirmation and reiteration of findings such as these negates the historical impact of race and racism on the educational experiences of Black students and shields schools and school districts from being responsible for addressing the “isms” brought into the classroom.

William Jeynes (2007) sought to examine the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of students in secondary school. Although the findings of this study point to the “positive effects of parental involvement for both white and minority children” (p. 82), the author spends a considerable amount of time discussing existing research on the “typical parent” who is involved in their child(ren)’s learning experience. The author cites various other authors and their research findings, such as Legutko (1998), Mulroy, Goldman, and Wales (1998), and Portes and MacLeod (1996), who concur that “highly educated parents are often more likely to acknowledge the importance of parental support in education and appreciate the importance of a good education in terms of living a successful adult life” (Jeynes, 2007, p. 102). It is apparent to me that these authors are perpetuating the false belief that less educated parents do not value education or the

importance of parental involvement. This particular study and others like it ignore the wealth of research that confirms the high value Black families have always placed on education (Allen, 2012).

Xu and Gulosino (2006) examined the importance of parent-teacher partnership on the academic performance of students and found that although existing research on teacher quality tends to focus on a teacher's credentials, it is apparent that quality should focus more on "behavioral aspects" such as the teacher's ability to partner with parents. This study cited teachers' apprehension about partnering with parents due to "feeling burnt out, worried that their instructions will be derailed or that attempts to partner will prove useless and a waste of time" (Xu & Gulosino, 2006, p. 364). In my own interactions with teachers as a parent, I experienced an unwillingness of teachers and administrators to implement my suggestions to aid my child's tendency towards becoming fidgety when he completed assignments before his peers. As an educator, I have been in parent-teacher conferences where what a parent shares has worked for their child in the past "fell on deaf ears" and was followed by scoffs after the meeting that the parent was making excuses for the child or lacked "control" of their child. Xu and Gulosino's study also missed the mark because the findings and discussion provided yet another shield, this one for teachers who are reluctant to partner with families.

The titles of these studies suggest a curiosity about the Black-white achievement gap (Jeynes, 2007); some even mention the possibility that schools and teachers contribute to the gap (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). However, further exploration of that possibility is left for future studies to determine, rather than being addressed in the study itself. These studies purport to be concerned with finding a remedy for the Black-white achievement gap but do not consider or test for the impact of racism and the implicit bias of teachers and its impact on learning

outcomes. This was a tendency of many of the studies I reviewed: a hyper focus on the deficits of the very participants the research is intended to help. It is as if these studies' real agenda is to perpetuate damage-centered narratives about Black families and the anticipated academic failure of their children.

My teaching experiences have predominantly taken place in urban public schools with largely Black student populations. My experiences as a parent attempting to partner with teachers in educating my son has been in suburban public schools and charter schools: five years in each setting. As a parent, teacher, and now researcher, I am left wondering how much of my experiences can be correlated with my race and the implicit bias of educators to dismiss my expertise and the expertise of other parents of Black students. Although my work does not look directly at the impact of racism on teacher-parent partnerships, it is important to note that race, racism, and implicit bias are missing from the research and are identifiable gaps in the literature. The purpose of my work is to shed light on the possible reasons Black students are experiencing education less equitably, to counter the tendency to be blinded by damage-centered narratives and instead directly discuss the impact of teacher biases on the academic achievement of Black students.

The unmotivated student narrative

In "Healthier Students Are Better Learners," Charles Basch (2011) points to the "disparities in health problems that disproportionately affect low income minority youth and the educationally relevant consequences" (p. 593). Basch asserts that "educational progress will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn" (p. 593). He continues, "particular health problems play a major role in limiting the motivation and ability to learn" (p. 593). It is important to note that the "relevant health disparities" Basch lists

relate to vision, asthma, teen pregnancy, aggression, violence, physical activity, inattention, and hyperactivity. Basch does not discuss the existing structural racism at fault for causing these disparities, such as lack of access to quality housing, healthcare, or jobs. Similar to the majority of existing research, the symptoms of a racialized society are discussed without acknowledging their originating points in history, such as the chattel enslavement of Black people, the Jim Crow era, and the use of the media and political platforms (Gilens, 1996) to permanently cast Blacks as the underclass.

Students' peer groups have also been shown to influence a student's disassociation with academic success for fear of "acting white" (Fordham, 1985). In line with Steele and Aronson's (1995) work on "stereotype threat," growing up Black in America is filled with mixed messaging about what it means to be Black. Stereotypes are fed to society through the media and do not bypass Black students. Black students face the internal battle of staying connected to their Black peers and not confirming existing stereotypes that they are inferior and less intelligent than their white peers. I argue that Black students who may be underachieving in exchange for a close connection with their Black peers are not being given much choice. I say this because, as evidenced by my own experience, being placed on a more challenging educational track was lonely. I was the only Black student in all of my classes, and I felt isolated and ignored. Black students who value relationship and connection with peers would likely stay on the less challenging track, with teachers who are less qualified to teach or manage a classroom, thus perpetuating academic underachievement. However, adolescents of any race would sooner choose peer group connection over an educational track that is isolating. Student failure in less challenging classes is then attributed to a lack of student discipline and motivation, without consideration being given to the teacher's lack of

experience as the cause. It is important to point out that white students do not have this hard choice to make because in schools, as in society, the majority of their peers are placed on higher educational tracks and in classrooms taught by qualified teachers with strong classroom management skills; their academic achievement is expected. In contrast, the outside influence of media portrayals of Blacks as crime prone, lazy, and uneducable, coupled with the in-school messaging Black students receive when they are disproportionately placed on less challenging educational tracks, would have Black youth believe that academic achievement, a successful career, and even marriage are white achievements.

School factors

Koth, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2008) examined two aspects of students' perceptions of school climate: order/discipline and achievement/motivation. Perceptions of school climate were directly associated with classroom climate. According to this work, students viewed their school climate as positive if their classroom teachers maintained order. Male and minority students had the most negative attitudes regarding school climate. The researchers asked students to complete a school climate survey and asked teachers to complete a demographic questionnaire and checklist of individual students' disruptive or aggressive behaviors. Although this study aimed to examine student perceptions of the school climate, part of the data analysis correlated negative classroom climate perceptions with classrooms that have a greater number of "disruptive students." Since teachers completed the "individualized disruptive and aggressive behavior" checklists, it appears this particular correlation protects teachers with a greater number of disruptive students from the reports of those very students who deem the climate to be negative. That is to say, classrooms that report a more negative climate perception but also have a greater number of disruptive

students would somehow cancel each other out. However, I am even more curious about the correlation between the teachers' perceptions of their students as disruptive or aggressive. How does this perception impact the way these teachers interact with students and how their students perceive them? Also missing from this study is a discussion about why male students and minoritized students have the "most negative attitudes" regarding school climate. There is a missed opportunity to delve deeper into both teachers' and students' perceptions by way of focus groups. The authors of this study made recommendations on how to improve the classroom climate in order to improve the school climate; however, a discussion about what is impacting teacher-student connections from the perspective of the students who are the focus of the school climate survey is not included. The purpose of my work is to hear directly from students about their classroom learning experiences in order to fill gaps in the existing literature about why Black students are underachieving academically.

In a 2006 policy analysis report, Harris and Herrington identified successful in-school factors such as promotion/graduation exams (PGEs) as instrumental in leading to an increase in students taking more challenging courses and passing. According to this policy analysis report, PGEs are the only form of accountability for which there is strong evidence of a reduction in the achievement gap, resulting from more rigorous content that students were "induced" to receive (Harris & Herrington, 2006, p. 229). Other policies were also analyzed, such as government-based accountability, which measures the outcomes of students and schools to implement reward and punishment; market-based accountability, which provides parents a greater choice in the schools their children attend through vouchers, tuition tax credits, and inter-district choices; and resources/capacity such as per pupil expenditures, pupil-teacher ratio, teacher quality, etc. What remained consistent throughout the analysis of

these policies was the authors noting that despite a narrowing of the gap under certain policies, the gap remains quite large. Although PGEs have shown the most positive impact in narrowing the achievement gap, the gap is statistically significant and points to “the problem evolving rather than declining” (Harris & Herrington, 2006 p. 224). Since this report has to do with the impact of policy on closing the achievement gap, it goes without saying the gap is between Black students and their white peers. What is troubling is that, although it is noted that the gap is widening and is statistically significant, there is no acknowledgement of why, despite the “effectiveness” of policies such as PGE, the gap is so resistant and persistent. I am caused to wonder whether the ineffectiveness of these reforms, as measured by the persistent gap, would be acceptable if white students were underachieving at such statistically significant and persistent rates.

What is common among these studies is the absence of directly addressing the role of racism in teachers’ apprehension about partnering with parents, or the dissociation of Black students from academic achievement for fear of failure or being accused of acting white, and finally, how teacher-student interactions are impacted by teachers’ beliefs in their students’ abilities. After nearly fifty years of failed reform efforts, it is time for a different approach to understanding the persistence of the Black-white achievement gap. Instead of acknowledging the impact of racism, discrimination, and implicit bias on the underachievement of Black students, much of the blame is placed on Black students and their families without disrupting the damage-centered rhetoric. The classroom learning experiences of Black students due to the influence of historical and contemporary forms of racism (including implicit bias and unrelenting daily experiences with racial microaggressions) will help explain the persistence of the gap in addition to suggesting ways to address the gap more effectively by

privileging/following student perspectives of the presence of racism in their classrooms. This will be my contribution to the existing literature on the academic achievement of Black students.

Critical Race Centered Research on Black Student Achievement

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) in “From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt” offers evidence that, similar to how the fiscal debt in the US is due to decisions made in the past, the achievement gap is actually a debt created by the decision to discriminate against and segregate Black people because of their skin color. Ladson-Billings states that the persistence of the gap cannot truly be addressed without first acknowledging and addressing decades of wrongdoing against Black children. Her renaming of “the gap” as a debt is significant in that she reframes the damaged-centered discourse, moving away from a hyper focus on Black student underperformance and highlighting instead the structures that have historically created obstacles and deficits for people of color.

Jean Baker’s 1999 study on teacher-student interaction in urban at-risk classrooms confirms the findings of earlier research on the importance of caring and supportive relationships with students. In this study, which surveyed and observed 61 students in third through fifth grade, students expressed differential levels of satisfaction with school in terms of the degree to which they felt their teachers were caring and supportive. However, similar to other studies, as part of the conclusion and suggestions, the focus is taken off of the school and teachers and placed on what can be done to help students who express dissatisfaction with school to foster positive relationships with their teachers. The suggestions are “interventions to foster [students’] affiliations to teachers and peers; cooperative groupings;

cross-age peer mentoring; and even mental health interventions” (p. 65). Again, despite teachers being in positions of power, it is the dissatisfied students who are found to be in need of intervention to facilitate positive teacher-student interactions.

Wanda Blanchett (2006) posits that “the disproportionate referral and placement of African American students in special education has become a discursive tool for exercising white privilege and racism” (p. 24). This is because the referral process is largely subjective and initiated by classroom teachers. A culturally unaware teacher is more likely to refer a student to special education when their students exhibit “hyperactivity and inattention” (Milner & Tenore, 2010) which is often misunderstood as a medical condition rather than a symptom of ineffective teaching pedagogy. This widely accepted subjective practice is especially accepted in urban public schools where social ills are more visible and thus readily viewed as the rational cause of student’s inattention and hyperactivity. Blanchett reviews existing literature to show the many areas of inequity, from funding to cultural incompetency and poorly prepared teachers, concluding that additional research is needed to “clearly document the ways in which white privilege and racism create and maintain disproportionality at all levels” (p. 27). At the end of this article, the author suggests areas for further research. However, I would argue that an extensive and exhaustive body of research already exists that “clearly document[s] the ways in which white privilege and racism create and maintain disproportionality”—but research is not being effectively utilized. Blanchett’s final recommendation—for “further research to develop research, policy and practice”—is what is actually needed in order to pressure education policymakers to acknowledge that there are experts in the education field whose research findings and suggestions are being ignored, to the detriment of generations of Black students attending public schools.

Roderick Carey (2013) asserts that “the language and labels so popular when discussing the achievement gap have served to distract stakeholders” (p. 2) from considering the origin of the gap. I share Carey’s view. While many are genuinely concerned about the gap, popular research focuses on factors such as family challenges, unmotivated students, and underfunded schools. However, after decades of attempting to address these factors through various reforms, the gap persists. According to Carey, “the language and labels associated with the gap further penalize already marginalized children, because the discourse has become normalized to a point of not being seriously challenged” (p. 23) to look deeper and beyond the popular narrative. Carey makes important points regarding the damage caused by the popular narrative’s race-based comparison of achievement levels. The normalization of the gap discourse makes it challenging to consider less popular factors, such as race and racism, that might help in understanding why the gap between Black students and their white middle-class peers has been so persistent. Carey goes further and makes several suggestions for how to change the discourse by challenging one-dimensional standardized tests and “finding ways to involve local, national and even the global community in the affairs of U.S. public school reform” (p. 23). These suggestions are admirable, but still circumvent a direct discussion about classroom factors, such as the impact of racism on the interactions between students and their teachers who hold implicit racial biases. The purpose of my work is to do just that: focus on classroom-level factors such as implicit bias by identifying racial microaggressions that are impacting the learning experiences of Black students.

As noted earlier, this less popular body of literature centralizes race and racism when discussing Black students' academic achievement but has not been successful in impacting education reforms or policies.

Conceptual Framework

A number of theories guide this work: critical race theory, expectation theory, racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, as well as student agency and achievement theories. It is my assertion that historical forms of race-based prejudice and discrimination, combined with differential expectations for academic achievement and behavior for Black students, are manifested as racial microaggressions in the classroom. These racial microaggressions take many forms but are not limited to the disproportionate placement of Black students in special education, or the disproportionate absence of Black students from advanced classes, or the disproportionate rate at which Black students are disciplined for the same infractions their white peers are not. Constantly guarding oneself against racial microaggressions leads to racial battle fatigue, a distracting mental and emotional exhaustion. It is my belief that, due to constantly battling against racial microaggressions from their first day of elementary school, the personal agency of Black students is chipped away. Given that personal agency has to do with a belief in one's ability to create their own desired outcomes, evidence that students' personal agency is being chipped away, due to constantly battling racial microaggressions would help explain why the academic achievement gap between black students and their white peers is so persistent and resistant to decades of reform. What has not been taken into account is how deeply woven into the fabric of every American institution racism and discrimination are.

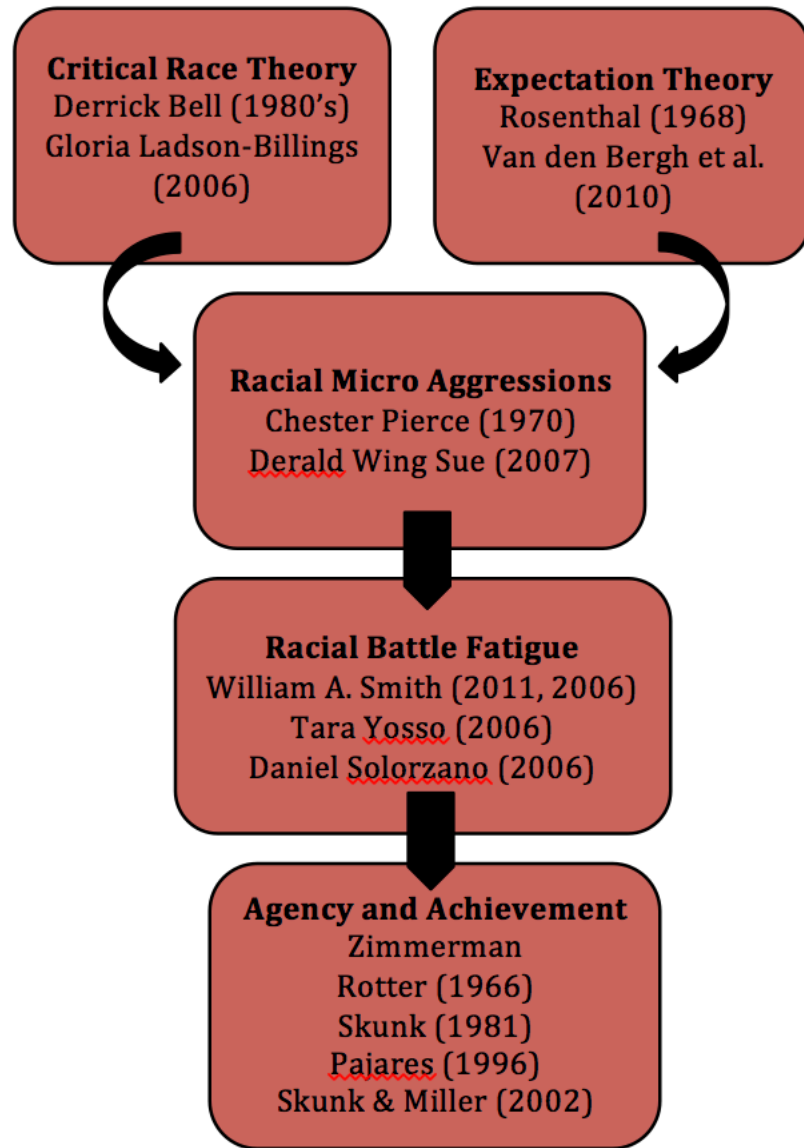


Figure 1. Conceptual map of the literature influencing this study.

The above figure is a selection of the existing literature influencing this work. An emphasis is being placed on the dates of these works here and throughout this paper to ensure the reader remains aware of the number of decades in which this information has been

available but reform efforts have failed to address the academic achievement gap between Black students and their white peers. The arrows represent the flow and connections of the literature. Critical race and expectation theory were the starting points for this study for understanding the possible connection between race and teacher expectations. This work led into the possible ways that students may be experiencing classroom learning using the categories of racial microaggression. A review of racial microaggressions led to racial battle fatigue, which describes the possible physiological symptoms of the cumulative effects of experiences with racial microaggressions. This led to a review of literature to identify how the cumulative effects of experiences of with racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue could affect student's agency and self-efficacy.

Figure 2 below graphically illustrates how these theories are interconnected, and a detailed discussion of critical race theory follows.

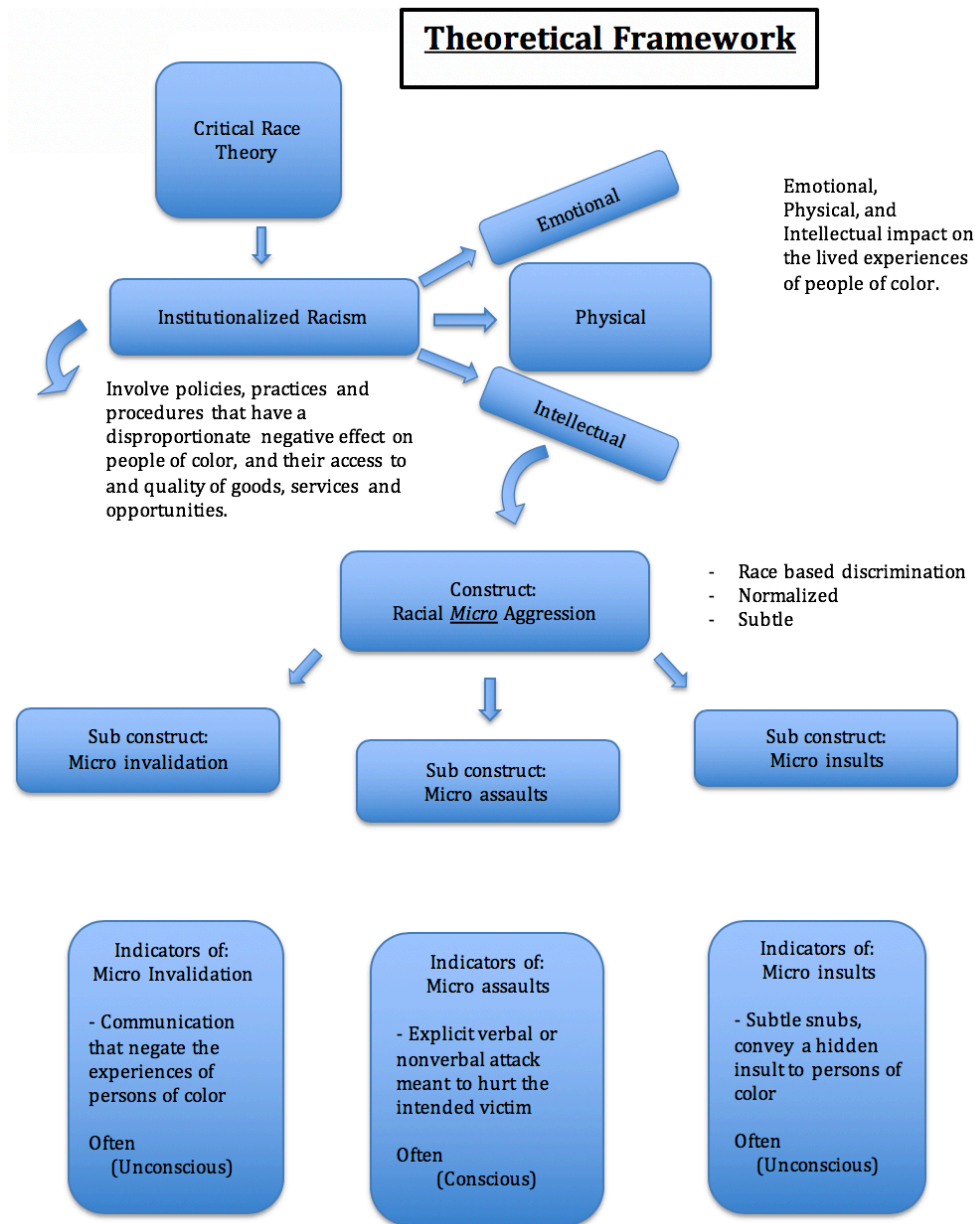


Figure 2. Theoretical framework.

Figure 2 is an illustration showing how the lived experiences of people of color are negatively impacted by the subtle but cumulative nature of racial microaggressions due to institutionalized racism. Critical race theory is the grounding literature used to centralize an examination of the history of racism in the United States and the ways in which racism, still

exists within every institution in America, from housing and healthcare to the legal system and education. Studying the impact of institutionalized racism on the lives of people of color led to an understanding that this lived experience subtly impacts the emotional, physical and psychological well-being of historically marginalized groups of people. Understanding how subtle forms of racism are experienced helped connect the subcategories of racial microaggression, which represent how impacted groups might be exposed to racial microaggressions; to the emotional, physical and psychological effects. This connection then allowed for indicators of the three subcategories of racial microaggression, to be identified as part of the procedure for exploring how Black students and their other-raced peers are experiencing classroom learning.

Critical race theory

Critical race theory frames the “paradox that despite a nearly universal condemnation [of racism], racism persists” (Harris, 2012, p. 5). It is this persistence of racism and its impact on the learning experiences of Black students that I am exploring. I am anchoring my research in the works of Derrick Bell (1992), Camara Phyllis Jones (2002), and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006). These theorists have written extensively and been widely cited for the contributions they have made in establishing critical race theory. Critical race theory prominently places the impact that racism has on the lives of people of color at the forefront of every discussion, recognizing that “the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination” (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2011, p. 303). While racism has always negatively impacted Black students, a newer, more subtle form of racism seeps into their classroom learning experiences as lowered expectations due to implicit biases. Critical race

theory is the backdrop for discussing how Black students may be experiencing the classroom learning environment.

According to critical race theorists, race is a social construct, an idea created to justify the mistreatment of a group of people based on their phenotype. In “Confronting Institutionalized Racism” (2002), Camara Phyllis Jones defines race as “a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on phenotype (the way people look)” (p. 9). The racist epistemology that justified slavery by classifying Black people as subhuman underpins everything that frames race relations in this nation, even to this day.

In a chapter published in *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education* (2009), Ladson-Billings asserts that “our understanding about race has moved beyond the bio-genetic categorization and notions of phenotype” (p. 19). As she explains, “while all other racial categories have fluctuated, the categories Black and white have remained in constant use on the Census since 1790” (p. 18). Further, these categories “create a sense of polar opposites that posits a cultural ranking designed to tell us who is white or perhaps more pointedly, who is not white” (p. 18). Ladson-Billings continues: “In a racialized society where whiteness is positioned as normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition” (p. 19). These definitions are important for understanding the impact of racism on the perceptions of educators, who, at the K–12 level, are mostly white and female. In education, although implicit racial biases may be subconscious on the part of teachers, they have no less impact on the educational experiences of Black students. As Morrison (1991, as cited by Ladson-Billings, 2000) posits,

When European Americans of various ethnic groups assert, “My people faced discrimination, and they made it. Why can’t Blacks pull themselves up like we

did?” they are ignoring the very different historical trajectories from which these cultural groups were launched and the very different symbol system that has been created to re-inscribe blackness and whiteness as fundamentally opposite. (p. 207)

Statements such as these imply that success is largely merit based: work hard and you too can achieve the American dream. However, this type of thinking ignores the chattel enslavement of Black people, the influence of the Jim Crow era, and the lasting impacts of institutionalized and structural racism.

Every school year, teachers and students are re-indoctrinated with the imperialist belief system of Eurocentric ideology through curriculum and teaching pedagogy that does not require teachers to be culturally aware (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Delpit, 2012; Bryan, 2017). Larry Cuban (1993) posits that “the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that teachers have, shape what they choose to do in their classrooms and explain both the constancy and the change that have shaped the core of instructional practices that have endured over time (p. 251). In “Emancipatory Narratives: Rewriting the Master Script in the School Curriculum” Ellen Swartz (1992) cites Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Giroux (1986), and Wynter (1990b) that Eurocentric ideologies “are inscribed upon the minds of students through repetition of a monological, exclusionary knowledge base that legitimates and replicates inequitable power relations from one generation to the next” (p. 342). Classrooms across America tend to lack culturally appropriate teaching pedagogy. This lack begins with course requirements in teacher preparation programs that do not require teaching candidates to unpack their biases and develop their cultural awareness and teaching

pedagogy in preparation for teaching students that are culturally diverse (Sleeter, 2001; Milner & Tenore, 2010).

Absent from curriculum and classroom pedagogy are the contributions of people of color. Students are fed incomplete and contradictory messages about the history and opportunities that exist in the US (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 7; Wayne, Brown, Calderon, & Banks, 2016). For example, the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans is taught as an act of mercy on the souls of savages. The Middle Passage is minimized as a trip from the continent of Africa across the Atlantic Ocean. The Civil War between the North and South is described as the paternal and moral North fighting for the freedom of enslaved Africans (Tripp, 2007). Finally, the achievement gap between white and Black students is understood as cognitive inability and familial challenges faced by Blacks. As Jones explains, “differential access to quality education and information (including about one’s own history) are examples of institutionalized racism” (p. 10). The discussion about social injustices faced in the communities of Black families, their places of work, and their schools is not a part of the curriculum, much less the discourse. In white-dominant curriculum, the absence of the contributions of other ethnicities is normalized. Students matriculate through school (K–12) misunderstanding the diverse contributions of persons of all ethnicities to the content areas. When the achievement gap is discussed, it is critically important to discuss all gaps, especially the hidden gaps in a curriculum solely based on the contributions and perspectives of Europeans. Without the telling of a more complete story about the savagery of those who took part in, justified and benefited from the enslavement of human beings using equally savage interpretations of science and religion, the mainstream belief in Eurocentric superiority and Black inferiority will continue unchallenged.

Black people in the US are continuously subjected to racialized macro and microaggressions across all major structures and spaces of this society. In 1994, Charles Murray and Dr. Richard Herrnstein authored the book *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (Murray & Herrnstein, 1994). Murray and Herrnstein are a psychologist and political scientist respectively, two very influential practitioners. So influential, in fact, that according to Derrick Bell (1995) in “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory?” within the first few months of publishing *The Bell Curve*, 300,000 copies sold. Murray and Herrnstein claimed in their book “race and class differences are largely caused by genetic factors” (as cited in Bell, 1995, p. 894). Bell explained that there was as much outrage as support for *The Bell Curve*, and he questioned the authors’ motive for publishing such a controversial book lacking in any new scientifically based data to support long-rejected pseudoscientific claims of race-based inferiority. Bell used an allegorical story interlaced with historical facts to propose a possible motive behind Murray and Herrnstein’s publishing of widely rejected theories of genetic inferiority. He suggested that these authors had applied an “oppression factor” to intelligence tests and discovered Black people actually have a higher IQ than whites. They then published their book to spare Black people from white rage.

As Bell described, the fictional oppression factor recognized “the debilitating effects of discrimination and exclusion on African Americans” (p. 894). Bell further described that “when the playing field was leveled via the oppression factor . . . blacks performed fifteen points higher than whites” (p. 894). In this allegory, their shocking findings led Murray and Herrnstein to “intentionally falsify their data [in order] to spare blacks the reprise and even

bloody retaliation they would have suffered had the real truth regarding their superior test performance come out” (p. 897).

Bell’s “unapologetically creative” (p. 899) allegory was written in one of the preferred methods of critical race theorists: storytelling. This style allowed him to disrupt the widely accepted myth of Black people as genetically inferior and thus justifiably discriminated against. Additionally, although Bell used fiction to propose a motive for Murray and Hernstein’s republishing of rejected theories of race-based inferiority, he did not miss the opportunity to weave in historical facts regarding the Black experience in America to further suggest a rationale behind Murray and Hernstein’s “patronizing and paternalistic” (p. 896) publication. According to Bell,

As history indicates all too well, blacks have suffered greatly as a result of discrimination undergirded and often justified by the general belief in black inferiority. But history shows with equal clarity, though it is less frequently acknowledged, that indications of black success and thus possible black superiority, result in white outrage. (p. 895)

As Bell (1995) asserted, white outrage is due to the challenge whites face as they come to grips with the historical conditions that led to their long-held beliefs in Black inferiority: “The reluctant recognition [of Black success] required admission that inferior status is the result of discrimination rather than the old racial rationales of inferior skills, lack of drive or the unwillingness to compete” (p. 897). I would add that the successes of Black people under the unique circumstance of 246 years of chattel slavery, 73 years of Jim Crow laws, and continued discrimination leading to unequal access to quality housing, healthcare, and education is no less than a miracle. I further suggest that works such as *The Bell Curve*

and other deficit- and damage-centered publications serve not only to perpetuate racism and discrimination, but also provide a benefit to some at the cost of others.

I assert just as males benefit in a sexist society, European Americans benefit in a racist society. The benefit that white people in America enjoy is “white privilege” (McIntosh, 1988), and it comes at a price for Black people. According to Powell (2007) “the older notions of individual and institutional racism cannot capture the important structural dynamics that shape the lives of people of color today” (p. 793). Further, at the level of societal organization, a structural model “helps us analyze how housing, education, employment, transportation, healthcare and other systems interact to produce racialized outcomes . . . allowing us to move beyond a narrow merit-based understanding of society” (Powell, 2007 p. 793). The focus of my work is to reveal the extent and manner in which Black students’ express and perceive the impacts of racism, discrimination, and implicit bias on their classroom learning experiences.

It is my belief that in education, due to institutionalized racism and discrimination the challenges that Black students face when attempting to receive a quality education are the same as the obstacles adults of color face when attempting to access quality housing, health care, or protection of the law. Black students disproportionately attend poorly maintained school buildings, are deterred from accessing challenging course work (U. S. Department of Education, 2008), and are subjected to harsh disciplinary policies (Blanchett, 2006; Milner & Tenore, 2010) and lowered expectations.

Despite clear documentation of the failure of schools in providing students with effective teachers, it continues to be the case that students—non-white, working class, gender fluid, and immigrant—are the ones who are penalized (Anyon, 1997), and Black students the

most heavily penalized. As Jones (2002) asserts, “the system of racism undermines the full potential of our society, when society does not invest in developing the genius of its children living in ghettos, barrios or reservations, because it feels it can get along without them, their genius is lost” (p. 9). According to many scholars, public education is a major perpetuator of racist beliefs and Eurocentric ideology (Bell, 1992; Delpit, 2012; hooks, 1994; McIntosh, 1988; Oakes, 2005). Students of color are predominantly taught by white female teachers from middle-class backgrounds who, by and large, have been indoctrinated to believe the racist stereotypes falsely ascribed to Black people and their communities.

One final dimension regarding the impact that teachers have on the academic achievement of Black students is teachers’ expectation of their students’ academic capabilities. This dimension is discussed in the next section.

Expectation theories

Teacher expectation. In classrooms, low teacher expectations refer to a teacher’s belief that the student or students in front of them will likely not succeed (Allen, 2012; Baker, 1999; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Numerous research studies have shown that a student’s achievement level is directly correlated with the level of expectation and quality of instruction provided by the teacher (Cuban, 1989; hooks, 1994; MacLeod, 2008; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). However, less than one-third of teachers believe that schools should expect all students to meet high academic standards and graduate with the skills to do college-level work. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) have referred to this correlation between expectation and outcome as a “self-fulfilling prophesy.” In *Keeping Track*, Jeannie Oakes (2005) posits, “Often teacher estimates of what students have already learned or their potential for learning is what determines how students are identified and placed” (p. 3). Unfortunately, for the most

part teachers come to their conclusion about students' cognitive ability subjectively and void of actual assessments. Carey (2013) theorizes that "labels help adults to position themselves in a more strategic way to pinpoint who is helpable and who is beyond help" (p. 460). Labels applied to Black students because of the color of their skin, which are disguised as cognitive ability designations that mask implicit biases, are likely inhibiting their learning experiences and academic achievement. Joyce Epstein (1985) explains that "experiences and labels acquired in the early years of school significantly influence students' opinions about themselves" (p. 25). Implicit racial biases impact teacher perceptions and subsequently lower the expectations teachers have of their Black students' academic capabilities, as well as students' perceptions of their own academic ability.

As noted earlier, countless studies have been conducted to try to understand the influence of teacher expectations on student achievement (Baker, 1999; Delpit, 2012; Klinger, 2007; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Nance, 2016; Oakes, 2005; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Warikoo, Sinclair, Fei, & Jacoby-Senghor, 2016). One significant classroom lesson that correlates expectation and achievement is the 1968 Jane Elliot classroom experiment in which the teacher Jane Elliot divided her all-white class into two groups based on eye color: brown eyed and blue eyed. She then told her students that all the brown-eyed students were superior. The brown-eyed students were given many special privileges: extra recess time, first to go to lunch, extra time with the teacher, etc. Immediate negative effects were noted in the academic artifacts of the blue-eyed students (Peters & Cobb, 1985). The blue-eyed students began to withdraw from learning, were making mistakes in areas they previously excelled at, and there was even bullying. I would argue that there is a comparable result in classrooms where teachers demonstrate lower academic and behavioral expectations

for their Black students. If student achievement can be correlated with what the teacher was told and their subsequent expectations of the student, then the fact that racism in the US is institutionalized would suggest that how teachers perceive of their students is racially biased, influences how they interact with their students, and potentially impacts the classroom learning experiences and subsequent academic success of their students. Rosenthal and Jacobson's classic work "Pygmalion in the Classroom" (1965) underscores the important effects of teachers' expectations.

In 1965 Rosenthal and Jacobson gave an intelligence test to all of the students at an elementary school, then randomly selected students and informed their teacher that these students "would show unusual intellectual gain... [as] established from their scores on the test for "intellectual blooming" (p. 444), when in fact this group of students had been chosen at random. Nevertheless, at the end of the year the students were retested and those students who had been randomly labeled intelligent showed a greater increase on the new test than the other children who had not been singled out (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Teacher expectations matter, many labels are arbitrarily assigned and adversely affect teachers' perceptions of students. In the US, race-based labels such as underprivileged, disadvantaged, and at risk condition many teachers to restrict their energy output (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) described a trend in which enthusiastic teaching was thought to be a waste of time for students' teachers believed to be inferior.

The research cited here speaks to the impact of institutionalized racism on teachers' perceptions and expectations of students. In classrooms across America, the residual effects of racism place students who are assumed less than competent at the mercy of educators who subconsciously lower their expectations because society has indoctrinated them into

believing Black students are less capable of academic success. As Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) have noted, teacher expectation is significant, and it should come as no surprise that Black students do not perform at the same level as their white peers who are expected to perform well. Next, I extend the discussion of teacher expectation to include the potential impact of teacher expectations on interactions in the classroom and how arbitrary labeling practices negatively impact academic achievement.

The power of perception. How one understands the way the world works is shaped, in part, by school experiences. Schools are one place where students are taught directly and indirectly the inner workings of dominant social norms, values, and behaviors (Cuban, 1993). A study of teacher attitudes towards anti-bias in-service training conducted by Vaught and Castagno (2008) “revealed teacher attitudes about the structural dimensions of racial” (p. 95) Vaught and Castagno observed that although teachers were aware of Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) seminal letter on white privilege and used the term and references to it frequently, “racial power (and so racism) was never truly engaged as a structural phenomenon. [Teachers’] white racial privileges failed to conceptually shift focus to the racial power inequities that structure institutions of schooling and the racial pattern of student school failure” (p. 99).

Just as structural racism impacts Black people’s access to healthcare, housing, and education, institutionalized racism impacts pedagogical practices, interactions, and the learning experiences of Black students in classrooms. And, much like the influence of institutionalized racism on the interactions between whites and Blacks in society, the interactions between teachers and their Black students are also influenced by institutionalized racism. In countless studies, Black students acknowledge the importance of getting a good

education and working hard in school, but they also acknowledge being aware that because of their skin color their efforts will not be rewarded. The power structure of a classroom is traditionally one sided: a Black student is more likely than not to be on the receiving end of a teacher's implicit biases and lowered expectation. The differential treatment and low expectations that Black students face are likely to impact their academic performance in ways similar to my own middle and high school experience.

The remainder of this literature review will focus on racial microaggressions in order to put into context the impact of racism on the lived experiences of Black people here in the US. I will also provide a pathway for understanding the role of racial microaggressions in the educational experiences of Black students.

Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are the slights, insults, and invalidations that people of color experience every day (Carroll, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2009; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). These aggressions are referred to as microaggressions because of their subtleness. However, despite the subtlety of racial microaggressions, the damage is significant and causes a type of fatigue that can be measured. This fatigue is referred to as racial battle fatigue and will be discussed in the next section.

Racial microaggressions describe what people of color experience on a daily basis when they are overlooked for a job promotion, followed in a department store, stopped by the police, exoticized, or praised for not acting like "the other black people." This study focuses on the racial microaggressions Black students experience in their classrooms. For Black students, racial microaggressions in a classroom may include such experiences as being

overlooked, not being called on in class unless the topic of discussion has to do with a “Black experience,” the teacher expressing surprise when a Black student does well, the teacher not acknowledging the contributions of Blacks to the acquired knowledge of a subject matter, etc.

Much of the existing research on racial microaggressions are works that study its impact on Black students at the college level. These studies illuminate the experiences of students of color as well as faculty of color at predominantly white colleges and universities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009). I am using the findings of these college-level studies to ground my understanding of the classroom learning experiences of Black high school students in the existing literature. I am also grounding my understanding of student experiences and their learning outcomes in the existing research on the impact of racial microaggressions on mental health service delivery (Sue et al., 2007). Studies on the impact of racial microaggressions in the mental health field highlight their detrimental impact on therapist-client relationship building. This literature points to the inability of therapists to “understand how issues of race influence and infect the delivery of service to clients” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Further research in the field of psychology confirms the existence of unconscious racial biases in “well-intentioned whites . . . nearly everyone born and raised in the United States inherits the racial biases of the society” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278). According to Sue et al. (2007), white Americans experience difficulty facing the probability that they “possess biased racial attitudes” or that they “may engage in behaviors that are discriminatory” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 275).

Lastly, Sue et al. (2007) have noted that when most perpetrators of racial microaggressions are confronted, “the perpetrator usually believes that the victim has

overreacted and is being overly sensitive and/or petty” (p. 278). However, as Sue et al. (2007) suggest, “the most accurate assessment about whether racist acts have occurred is most likely to be made by those most disempowered rather than those who enjoy the privileges of power” (p. 278). Sue et al. write that “considerable empirical evidence [e.g., Allen, 2012; Huber & Solorzano, 2014] exists showing that racial microaggressions become automatic because of cultural conditioning” (p. 277). Across the US, “cultural conditioning” fictitiously locates the social ills of society as Black and Brown issues (Sue et al., 2007, p. 277). In accordance with this research, it is thus more than likely that the racial biases of classroom teachers are being acted out, even if implicitly, on their students of color. Using racial microaggressions as both a theory and a lens, I am interested in exploring the ways and the extent to which Black students report experiencing racial microaggressions in the classroom.

Although microaggressions may seem harmless, Sue et al. (2007) assert that “their effects can be quite dramatic . . . the contemporary form of racism is many times over, more problematic, damaging, and injurious to persons of color than overt racist acts” (p. 279). Furthermore, these authors write, “the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions may theoretically result in diminished mortality, augmented morbidity and flattened confidence” (p. 279). It is important that racial microaggressions be acknowledged as acutely harmful, otherwise the effect will continue to be ignored and downplayed as insignificant factors when they should actually be centralized to better understand the far-reaching and long-lasting impact. Sue et al. refer to this phenomenon as “a conspiracy of silence” (p. 279). I posit that it is this conspiracy of silence that enables the “gap” in academic achievement between Black and white students to have become normalized and accepted as an unfortunate effect of

poverty, single-parent/low-income households, underfunded schools, poorly prepared teachers, and unmotivated students.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Despite the many education reforms aimed at addressing the achievement gap, racism—whether subtle or egregious—is rarely discussed as a major in-school factor impacting students’ academic achievement. However, as a public school educator, I am keenly aware of the racism, discrimination, and implicit bias that exist within schools. From my personal experience, as a student of public schools and a parent of a child in the public school system, I am also keenly aware of the effect of cumulative experiences of racial microaggressions.

The cumulative adverse psychological, psychosocial, and physical effects of racial microaggressions have been referred to as racial battle fatigue (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2011). The health effects include increased stress levels, high blood pressure, and tension in addition to lowered self-confidence, low self-esteem, and the absence of belief “in one’s ability to bring into fruition desired ambitions” (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 64). Racial battle fatigue refers to the strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost to coping with racial microaggression and racism. For Black people, racial battle fatigue is the result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, and emotional coping with racial microaggression in racially hostile or unsupportive environments. In a multiethnic study of adult participants conducted by Carter and Forsyth (2010, as cited by Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011, p. 37), “American Indian, Asian American, Black, Latina/o and biracial participants experienced most of their racial incidents

at work (32%) or at school (25%) and the vast majority (82%) described their experiences as recurring incidents.” There can be no doubt that, as Smith, Yosso, and Solorzano (2011) assert, “constantly battling racial stress takes a toll on the lives of people of color” (p. 301).

The existing studies on the impact of racial battle fatigue are concentrated at the college level. This study will add to the existing body of literature by extending the discussion to include the learning experiences of Black students at the K–12 level. I anticipate the classroom learning experiences of Black students to be comparable to students at the college level, yet more concerning due to the teacher-student power dynamic impacting student agency in K–12 classrooms. As noted earlier by Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011), constantly battling racial microaggression results in lowered self-confidence, esteem, and belief in one’s ability to achieve desired ambitions. To feel less confident in one’s ability to meet one’s goals indicates a negative impact on personal agency. Nzuki (2010) describes agency as “the understanding that individuals have the capacity to author their identities by resisting and/or reacting against structural and cultural forces” (p. 77). At the K–12 level, institutionalized racism impacts every aspect of schooling, from the textbooks and lesson plans to the subtle exchanges between student and teacher. Zimmerman and Cleary (2006) assert that acquiring a sense of personal agency is a “major challenge that adolescents encounter during their teenage years” (p. 45). Not all acts of personal agency are viewed as serving the best interest of the individual, in the traditional sense of understanding agency; however, for Black adolescents, who choose to escape the daily assaults, insults, and invalidations of schooling leaving school is can be viewed as an act of survival (Fine, 1991; Majors, 2001; Martin, 2015).

Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) note that “findings of multiethnic college surveys show that students of color, both female and male, struggle to survive academically while battling against racism” (p. 552). The authors continue, “these experiences are often detrimental to educational aspirations and achievement” (p. 553). In similar fashion, Black students at the K–12 level might also find it challenging to constantly battle the implicit biases and lowered expectations of their teachers, preferring instead to slowly or suddenly distance themselves from stressful conflicts and the impact of these experiences by becoming academically disengaged. This is especially true for Black males.

Historically speaking, both inside and outside of school, Black males are in a constant battle against mistreatment due to racism. Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) assert that “despite various coping strategies Black male college students, for example, express high levels of repressed frustration, greater dropout or ‘slow-out’ rates, and lower grades because of mundane, extreme, environmental stressors faced in public, academic, and social spaces on and off campus” (p. 557). Further,

the plight of Black males has been largely ignored, unanalyzed, or under analyzed. Consequently, popular and conservative commentaries tend to be the rationale that race discrimination no longer matters for academic achievement. This gives support to the “sincere fictions” in white minds that justify assumptions about Black male pathology and blame Black men for any lack of success in a supposedly fair and open society. (Smith, Allen, & Danley, p. 558)

The consequences for young Black men of dismissing the impact of constantly battling racism and discrimination are costly and cyclical. According to Smith, Allen, and

Danley (2007), “trend data indicate that Black males are more likely to drop out of high school and college and consequently more Black men will abuse drugs, become incarcerated and have higher rates of psychological disturbances” (p. 557). As noted before, some acts of personal agency, such as dropping out of school, may not be in the best interest of the individual due to the long-term economic impact, but the act of removing oneself from a situation or environment that is causing harm is no less an act of personal agency. However, research and discourse on the dropout rate situates the problem with the students themselves; students who drop out of school are characterized as “unreasonable or academically inferior” (Fine, 1991, p. 5). Structures, ideologies, and practices that exile students systematically are rendered invisible, and students’ voices are institutionally silenced (Delpit 2012; Fine 1991). In this study I am centralizing the cumulative impacts of racism, discrimination, and implicit bias on the academic achievement of Black students as critical elements to be added to the achievement gap discourse in order to better understand the academic underachievement of Black students and the critical effect of racial bias in the K–12 classroom. The next section examines student self-efficacy and personal agency in order to understand yet another layer of the persistence of the achievement gap despite numerous education reforms.

Student Agency and Academic Achievement

Self-efficacy and agency are important aspects of Black students’ educational experiences. Much has been written to explain that those who accomplish their goals succeed because of their internal drive and direction. And although the conclusions of this research appear to be straightforward, I must disrupt this sentiment. Swaths of K–12 students, specifically Black children who are not fully realizing the productive benefits of tapping into

and applying their self-efficacy and personal agency, are not simply lacking in agency; rather, they are exercising their agency contrarily to popular notions of agency (Fine, 1991; C. Phillips, 2017). I discuss these two concepts below.

Self-efficacy

According to Zimmerman and Cleary (2006), self-efficacy is “the belief in one’s effectiveness in performing specific task” (p. 45). These researchers assert that self-efficacy is a better predictor of a positive attitude (in the case of their study, towards mathematics) than agency. I would assert that self-efficacy is also a good predictor of a positive attitude towards schooling in general. According to Albert Bandura (1993), “efficacy beliefs influence how people think, motivate themselves and behave” (p. 118). For Black students attending public school in the US, I question the strength of their efficacy amidst the constant battle against racial microaggressions. A student’s self-efficacy is supposed to contribute to their academic performance above and beyond the effects of their actual abilities (Bandura, 1993); however, the persistence of the achievement gap among Black students reveals a more impactful variable in their learning experiences that likely has the effect of dimming or even extinguishing students’ self-confidence that they can or will be academically successful. Bernard Weiner (1986), as cited in Zimmerman and Cleary (2006), asserts that “student perception of the causes of academic success or failure determines their expectation of future performance” (p. 62). Students typically ascribe academic failure to a lack in their cognitive abilities, while parents ascribe failure to a lack of focus and teachers ascribe it to a lack of effort and/or motivation. However, I agree with Lanette Waddell (2010) that students’ self-efficacy is being chipped away through classroom interactions and experiences. Students enter school believing they are going to become lawyers, doctors, famous athletes, or

celebrities, and before middle school that self-efficacy has dimmed. It is possible that underachievement, either through emotional disidentification (Majors, 2001) with schooling or physical disassociation with the school building, is how some students apply their personal agency to less than favorable conditions that threaten their well-being (Fine, 1991).

Agency

In a study she conducted at a comprehensive high school in New York City, Fine (1991) was surprised to discover that students who dropped out of school were more agentic than students who stayed in school, who were found to be teacher dependent and conformist. Those who dropped out of school were found to be more psychologically healthy in comparison to students who stayed in school, who were significantly more depressed (Fine, 1991). Lastly, Fine (1991) found that students who dropped out of school “could be reconceptualized as critics of educational and labor market arrangements” (Fine, 1991). However, students who exercise their agency and drop out of school are typically labeled as depressed, helpless, hopeless, and ever without options (Fine & Rosenberg, 1983, as cited in Fine, 1991).

There appear to be two different types of agency: productive and unproductive. Productive applications of personal agency during students’ K–12 years would mean that, despite obstacles, hurdles, and challenges, students tap into their internal drive and determination to achieve their goals, without making excuses about external factors that impact their efforts (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). For this group of students even if their internal drive to achieve set goals is disrupted, there are external forces, such as caring adults who provide the necessary and constant guidance for students to navigate over and around obstacles (Jackson, 2003). An “unproductive” application of personal agency is a bit more

nuanced, however. According to yearly comparative reports, the more education one has the greater their lifetime earning potential. At first glance students who “choose to leave” school prior to earning their high school diploma are setting themselves up for failure. However, while this big-picture perspective may have merit, Fine (1991), Eve Tuck (2009) and Crystal Phillips (2017) would argue differently. These authors would argue that dropping out of school is, in itself, an act of agency. Phillips (2017) reflects on her own experience in a high school honors English class:

My ninth grade honors English teacher [made] us feel unsure of ourselves and our level of intelligence; she had a cold demeanor. . . . We were never given the opportunity to express ourselves and feel a sense of positive student-teacher relationship. I dropped out of the course at the end of the first semester. . . . I didn’t like the uneasy, inept feeling I got every day in her classroom. (p. 134)

Phillips (2017) goes on to explain that even though this experience did not make her want to quit school immediately, the experience did cause her to feel the need to separate herself from school because perhaps she was not smart enough—this despite having earned a B in that honors English class. Fine (1991) refers to experiences like Phillips’ as “institutionalized silencing”—experiences that cause students to begin to disassociate themselves with schooling. She implores us to look at the policies, practices, and ideologies in schools that silence students. For example, according to Phillips (2017), mundane and repetitive lessons stifle personal connection, creativity, and expression. Zero tolerance policies “silence students through punishments that mostly exclude them from the classroom leaving students to feel like outsiders” (p. 139). These are examples of characteristics of

public-school life that activate “social anxieties” (Fine, 1991), and these a/effects are what this study seeks to explore as it relates to the classroom learning experiences of Black students and the impacts of implicit racial bias.

The ability of people to move and act in accordance with how they perceive themselves, or are perceived by others, and what they are able to do in their social environment, are based on relationships of power, control, and negotiation (Sauer, 2015, p. 28). These decision-making processes, to move and act, to control and negotiate, are defined by researchers as agency (Sauer, 2015, p. 28). Therefore, for students, disassociating from schooling through the act of withdrawing from school physically or emotionally is an act of agency. It is clear that there are risks associated with both staying in school and dropping out. Students who stay in school survive by conforming and are notably more depressed. Those who “drop out,” though more agentic, are likely to face the harsh realities of a 21st-century labor market that requires one to have a college degree to earn a living wage. Learning more about the classroom learning experiences of Black students and the impacts of racism, discrimination, and implicit bias will fill gaps in the research related to the persistence of the academic achievement gap for both groups of students: those who stay in school and are significantly more depressed and those who exercise their agency and leave school before earning a high school diploma.

It is important to note that although this work highlights the challenging experiences that Black students face due to the residual impacts of racism, discrimination, and implicit bias, I am in no way asserting that all Black students are failing academically or that hard work towards overcoming obstacles faced in learning environments is fruitless. Rather, I am asserting that for too many Black students, as evidenced by the statistical data on academic

achievement, despite decades of education reform to mitigate the impacts of poverty, single-parent households, unqualified teachers, and teacher inexperience, an alarming number of Black students are still not achieving at anticipated academic levels. The reforms, though intended to address the problem areas cited by much of the deficit- and damage-centered research, have been largely ineffective for Black and Hispanic students (Anyon, 1997; Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954; Burris & Welner, 2005; Carey, 2013; Clotfelter et al., 2009; Gardner, 1983). Countless efforts to reform education in order to address academic access, excellence, and achievement among historically marginalized students have failed to close the academic achievement gap. A majority of these reforms, which, as Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts, can be summed up as “just good teaching” (p. 159), are seemingly having a more positive effect on the learning experiences and outcomes of white and Asian students, who continue to achieve at higher rates on national assessments, as evidenced by academic achievement measures such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; 2013), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS; Gonzales, 2008), and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2013).

The impetus for my curiosity and concern about the persistent phenomenon of Black underachievement began with my own educational experiences and climaxed as I watched my child morph from a bright-eyed little boy excited about school and becoming “everything!” into a 16-year-old who is “done with school” and doesn’t even want to think about college. I recall my son’s very first day of kindergarten as one of excitement. He was eager and ready. However, within two months, his affect changed. My 5-year-old son was no longer excited about going to school. I received letters from the school saying he should be

tested for hyperactivity. At a parent-teacher conference I was shown a drawing he had made of our family. The teacher was concerned that the stick people did not have bodies. The teacher explained that although she had repeatedly told my son this was not the right way to draw people, he continued to draw them incorrectly. Imagine a 5-year-old being reprimanded for not “properly” drawing people. Now imagine a student being reprimanded for their entire K–12 education for not conforming to teacher/school expectation for behavior or academic achievement (Waddell, 2010), reprimanded for being disorganized, not having multiplication facts mastered, having messy homework, forgetting permission slips, talking too much in class, not using “proper English,” being off-task, being out of seat without permission, not raising their hand and waiting to be called on, failing classes, wearing the wrong hair style or style of dress, being late for class without a pass, talking back to the teacher, fighting, skipping school, etc. At some point along the lived experience of many Black students did their personal agency wane. As Bruce Jackson (2003) explains, “for students who start feeling unsuccessful or ‘slow’ in crucial academic skills such as math and reading, the process of dis-identification and alienation from academic work soon becomes self-perpetuating” (p. 580). When I sent my son to school, I know he went to school with advanced literacy and numeracy skills and he fully believed in his ability to do well in school. He was excited about becoming a lawyer and a policeman and a basketball player; the sky was his limit. The nondiscriminatory rate of failure among Black students from affluent, educated, two-parent, single-parent, or poor families due to physical and/or emotional separation from education will continue until serious consideration is given and action taken to address the existence of racism, discrimination, and implicit bias in the learning environment.

Conclusion

Racism in the US has been institutionalized and thus impacts all institutions, including education. The term racial microaggression helps to explain how subtle forms of racism, micro assaults, micro insults, and micro invalidations accumulate in the lives of people of color, causing significant harm. Critical race theory has allowed me to frame the legitimizing, legalizing, and normalizing of racism in the US. Implicit bias and expectation theories have allowed me to show the powerful influence of subtle forms of racism on expectation. Together critical race theory, implicit bias, expectation theory, and racial microaggression have provided the foundation on which I can analyze the classroom learning experiences of students who participate in this research study. The discussion on the diminishing effectiveness of personal agency and self-efficacy, as it relates to the differing ways students express their agency and believe they have the ability to accomplish set goals, sheds light on the need to understand their classroom learning experiences. Utilizing both a survey and a focus group, I will use the three racial microaggression categories—micro assault, micro insult, and micro invalidation—to measure and compare the statistical significance of reported experiences with racial microaggressions among students of all racial backgrounds attending an urban public school in a large urban district. It is my hope that this work will provide a useful lens for understanding and addressing the gap in academic achievement between Black students and their white middle-class peers.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Despite decades of reform policies, the K–12 academic achievement gap between Black students and their white peers has been persistent and resistant. The achievement gap is predominantly understood as a gap that will continue to exist because of the general lower socioeconomic status of Black families, the low education level of Black parents, and the densely populated, poverty-stricken, and crime ridden environments Black children are being raised in. According to the work of Fordham and Ogbu (1986), the gap exists and in some cases is even wider among middle- and upper-class Black students when compared to their white peers. Even though socioeconomic status, parents' education level, and safe communities are not barriers to academic performance for middle- and upper-class Black families, the gap persists. Therefore, the academic achievement gap between Black and white students must be studied through a different lens.

The Study

This study uses the lens of racial microaggressions to study the influence of institutionalized racism and implicit bias on the classroom learning experiences of Black students. Racial microaggressions are the daily micro assaults, insults, and invalidations acted out by perpetrators who are unaware of the impact of their behavior on the emotional, physiological, and psychological well-being of people of color (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). The study's purpose was to determine whether and to what extent Black students

report experiencing different a/effects in the classroom in comparison to their other-raced peers. How do Black students in an urban public-school experience racial microaggression in the classroom? How do racial microaggressions influence the learning experiences and learning outcomes of Black students, from their perspective?

This research used a mixed methods design comprising two phases. In the quantitative first phase, I used existing racial microaggression indicators and indicator descriptions established by Derald Wing Sue and colleagues (2007) to measure students' reported experiences of perceived offenses. The qualitative second phase was conducted as a follow up to the quantitative phase; it used focus groups to help explain the quantitative results. In this explanatory second phase, students were given an opportunity to expound on the quantitative survey results. The goal was to explore the lived experiences of Black students in the sixth to twelfth grades and their perceptions of the impact of racial microaggressions on their academic achievement in an urban public school. I presented students with findings from the quantitative phase of the study and had them discuss how the survey results were similar or not to their own experiences, personal or witnessed.

The contribution this study seeks to make includes presenting racial microaggression as a significant lens for understanding the persistence of the K–12 academic performance gap between Black high school students and their other-raced peers. Utilizing a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, this study centralizes the impact of racial microaggression as a potentially more significant variable than family economic status, parental education, or zip code.

Methodology

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used to compare how Black students reported their teacher interactions and classroom learning experiences in comparison to their other-raced peers. Using the micro racial aggressions categories of assaults, insults, and invalidations as a guide, I then explored how Black students described their classroom learning experiences and the impact of these experiences on their academic achievement. This mixed methods study modified an existing survey instrument (American Institutes for Research, 2020) used in the researcher's school district in the quantitative first phase (see Appendix A for peer review of survey instrument); the qualitative second phase consisted of a semi structured focus group (see Research Questions below).

Mixed methods

I aimed to provide a complete analysis of participating students' classroom learning experiences. Clark and Creswell's (2008) description of a multiphase research approach led me to decide on a mixed methods research methodology. Mixed methods, as a research design, dates back to the 1980s and chiefly aims to provide the most complete analysis of a problem by combining quantitative and qualitative forms of data (Clark & Creswell, 2008). Due to the complexity of institutional racism and the potentially significant influence of racism and implicit bias on the classroom learning experiences of Black students, the persistent gap in academic achievement should be studied through multiple phases. The use of a mixed methods approach to provide a more complete picture of a lived experience is not unfamiliar. For example, Torres, Driscoll, and Burrow (2010) used a mixed-methods design in their study "Microaggressions and Psychological Functioning Among High-Achieving African-Americans: A Mixed-Methods Approach."

Mixing quantitative and qualitative research methods for the purpose of complementarity (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 61) provided a means to quantify Black students' lived experience as well as to provide them an opportunity to discuss and offer examples of their experiences. Greene, Garacelli, and Graham (1989, as cited in Creswell & Clark, 2011) note that this approach "seeks the elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of the results from one method with the results from the other method" (p. 62). This research aimed to enhance the quantitative survey phase of the study with the qualitative focus group phase.

Sequential explanatory mixed methods design

In this section the chosen research method is further defined. The quantitative and qualitative phases of the study are described in more detail in later sections, as are the survey and the focus group question.

Within a mixed-methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative research, a sequential explanatory mixed methods study involves sequential timing, where "the researcher implements the strands [quantitative and qualitative] in two distinct phases" (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 66) and "the overall purpose . . . is to use a qualitative strand to explain initial quantitative results" (p. 66). It is important to emphasize that equal importance is placed on both phases of the study, because the purpose of the mixed methods sequence is enhancement. This research sought to better understand the phenomenon of the persistent academic performance gap between Black and white students by determining whether a correlation exists between reported experiences with perceived racial microaggressions and students' self-identified racial background. Ultimately this study aimed to "assess trends and

relationships with the quantitative data but also explain the reason behind the trends”

(Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 82) and the implications of the findings.

Using racial microaggression as a lens to explore the possible ways that students might experience racism, this study presented the following research questions to be initially answered by participants through an online survey in the quantitative phase of the study and then expounded upon in a semi structured focus group in the qualitative phase of the study.

Research Questions

Guiding questions: Quantitative phase

The questions guiding quantitative phase of the study were:

- 1) Is there a statistically significant difference between how Black students report their experiences with racial microaggressions in comparison to their other-raced peers?
- 2) How do Black students’ experience learning in their classrooms in comparison to their other-raced peers?
- 3) To what extent are the experiences of Blacks students correlated with indicators for racial battle fatigue?

Guiding questions: Qualitative phase

When creating questions for the focus group, I selected data with response rates that were surprising, interesting, and/or were significantly correlated. These results informed the questions for the focus group. The following questions were used to guide this work:

- 1) Do the Black students who participate in the focus groups agree with the results of the survey?
- 2) How do Black students describe their own classroom learning experiences?

- a. To what extent do students' experiences correlate with the terms *racial microaggression* and *racial battle fatigue*?
- 3) To what extent do Black students connect their classroom learning experiences to their academic performance?

Research Site and Participants

Data for this study were collected directly from students attending public middle and high schools in or near a large urban school district in the northeastern region of the United States. A typical urban public school in any district across the United States has a largely white and female teaching staff. The majority of the students attending school in or near this large urban school district are Black and Hispanic. For the purposes of this study, diverse representations of students were invited to participate in the online survey phase. The aim was a diverse survey participation as close as possible to 35% Black, 42% Hispanic, 9% Asian, and 14% white as these are the demographic representations of student groups for this geographic area (Boston Public Schools, 2016).

In the quantitative phase of the study, I collected survey data from 95 students in grades 6–12 to test the prevalence of perceived experiences with racial microaggressions in the classroom. 16 participants, who self-identified as Black, were invited to participate in the focus group phase of the study.

Site Permission

This research was not conducted within a school setting and so did not require site permission.

Phase 1: Survey—Quantitative Phase

In this study, the methods for gathering qualitative and quantitative data were not the same. For the quantitative phase of the study I recruited racially diverse student participants. The purpose of surveying a racially diverse population was to determine whether reported classroom learning experiences are significantly different for students of different racial backgrounds. A large, racially diverse participant group allowed me to determine statistically significant results among all of the races. These results are reported in the next chapter to show the degree to which students' learning experiences differ by each racial group. Thereafter, the study focuses only on the statistically significant results of Black students' experiences with racial microaggressions in relation to their other-raced peers.

The survey sought to determine whether there is a higher incidence of reported experiences of racial microaggressions among Black students as compared to their other-raced peers and specifically white peers. According to popular research (Anyon, 1997), one would expect the results to be polarized, with white and Asian students having more positive classroom learning experiences and Black and Hispanic students having more negative classroom learning experiences.

The following hypotheses were tested to determine whether or not Black students reported classroom-learning experiences that are significantly different than the reported classroom learning experiences of their other-raced peers. The null hypothesis that was tested is as follows:

- There is no significant difference in students' perceptions of their classroom learning experiences in the different racial groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian, white).

The alternative hypothesis is as follows:

- There is a significant difference in the perceptions of students about their classroom learning experiences in the different racial groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian, white).

Recruitment of survey participants

In order to determine whether students report a significantly different classroom learning experience based on their race, students in grades 6–12 attending public school in or near a large urban school district in the North eastern region of the United States were invited to participate in this study (see Appendix B for recruitment letter). According to McKown and Weinstein (2003), “children become better at inferring others’ specific social beliefs after age 6” (p. 505). Sixth- to twelfth-grade students have had enough school experience to be able to articulate their observation and perceptions of their classroom learning experiences.

A flyer was posted on two social media sites (Facebook and Instagram) inviting parents to have their child(ren) participate in the study by completing the online survey. A link to the survey was included in all postings. The survey window opened on April 23, 2018 and closed on July 1, 2018. Postcard flyers with information about the survey were also handed out to families and students at middle and high school events.

The participants ranged in age between 11 and 18 years old and were of various racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds representative of a diverse school population. The languages spoken at home were representative of the diversity of typical schools. Because the participants were minors, parental consent was obtained (see Appendix C) prior to students taking part in the survey; assent from student participants was also obtained (see Appendix D). To maximize participation and completion of the online survey, I offered free entry in a \$10 gift card raffle as an incentive.

Survey method

In the first phase, 95 students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds in grades 6 through 12 participated in the online survey by answering 33 questions. The demographics section of the online survey included an additional question specifically for student participants who identified as Black, inviting them to self-identify whether they were interested in participating in the focus group. The sample of students who participated in the study is considered “nonprobabilistic” because students who were selected to participate were those who were available. In probabilistic sampling, the selection of participants is based on a systematic procedure to ensure each student in the student population has a known chance of being selected (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Additionally, the small sample size of students who participated in this study, though not generalizable to the student population in or near this large urban school district, did achieve the intent of “maximal variation,” which means that “diverse individuals were chosen who were expected to hold a different perspective” on their classroom learning experiences (Creswell & Clark, 2011 p. 174).

The survey window was open towards the end of the 2017–2018 school year and again through the summer of 2019. This data collection took place at the end of the school year and over the summer, to minimize disruptions to students’ academic focus. With parent permission, students completed the online survey independently and without assistance.

Survey quality and reliability

Since this research used a modified existing instrument, the survey was piloted to determine reliability of the responses. The pilot ensured that the survey questions and responses were aligned with the research questions for this study.

The online survey consisted of 33 questions, 18 of which were related to classroom learning experiences and took on average 15 minutes to complete (see Appendix E). The indicators for racial microaggression categories were used as indicators to categorize the survey questions. Student responses were limited to a four-point likert scale when answering questions about their classroom learning experiences. The 4-point Likert scale response options were: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). A four-point Likert scale was chosen, instead of a five-point scale, to avoid the over selection of a neutral response. 95 surveys were collected; however, 4 surveys were excluded from the analysis because less than 10 of the 33 questions were answered.

Quantitative data analysis

Creswell and Clark (2011) explain, “in quantitative research, the investigator begins by converting the raw data into a form useful for data analysis” (p. 204). In this study, Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a statistical computer-based program, was used to analyze the data. The qualitative data collected from the online survey was assigned numeric values to allow for scoring. Data entry errors were “cleaned” from the database. According to Creswell and Clark (2011) “a codebook that lists the variables, their definitions, and the numbers associated with the response options for each option also needs to be developed” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 206). I recoded and computed the new variables needed to analyze trends and themes. As the data was being analyzed for trends, I recorded memos in a journal to capture preliminary understandings (Creswell & Clark, 2011). SPSS was also used to assess the quality scores and determine the reliability and validity of the data collected (Creswell & Clark, 2011). With SPSS Statistics I tested for descriptive trends,

comparative trends, and relationships among students' responses to determine their correlational significance (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

To determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between how Black students and their other-raced peers responded in the survey data a descriptive analysis, the mean, standard deviation, and variance of responses to each item is included (Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 206). In Chapter 4, tables and figures are included to make the data easier to read and understand (Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 208). Findings are presented with summarizing statements for each of the four classroom learning experience categories: classroom learning, racial microaggression, racial battle fatigue and self-efficacy.

Phase 2: Focus Group—Qualitative Phase

The second phase of this study was a focus group; this phase evolved from the results of the quantitative phase (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Students who identified as Black in the first phase provided digital consent to be contacted to participate in the second phase (Creswell & Clark, 2011). According to Creswell and Clark (2011), since the “intent of [mixed methods] design is to use qualitative data to provide more detail about the quantitative results . . . the individuals best suited to do so are ones who contributed to the quantitative data set” (p. 185). Of the students who volunteered to participate in the focus group, sixteen students were selected.

The focus group sessions were semi structured, meaning there were a set of planned questions to guide the discussion. Depending on students' responses follow up questions were also asked. Results from the quantitative first phase of this study informed the questions

for the focus group. I conducted a total of three focus group discussions, each consisting of 4 to 7 students in middle and high school, grades 6 through 12.

Data collection

Initially, I intended to use a strictly volunteer approach to allow participants from the first phase to self-select into the second phase; however, according to Creswell and Clark (2011), “this approach provides a weaker connection between phases” (p. 186). Creswell and Clark suggest that “a more systematic approach is to use the quantitative statistical results to select participants best able to explain the phenomenon of interest” (p. 186). I used a combination of participant self-selection and statistically significant results from the quantitative phase of the study to select a small group of student participants for the qualitative phase. As a reminder, as part of the demographic section of the online survey, students who identified as Black received an additional question inviting them to participate in a focus group and asking them to provide consent to be contacted if they were interested in participating.

Validity and reliability

Using multiple sources of data allowed me to identify trends and discrepancies in the data collected. Member checks and auditing ensured consistency and agreement between the codes and the data. To ensure construct validity, I piloted the survey and focus group questions. Member checking was employed to allow focus group participants to discuss whether preliminary analysis of the survey data accurately reflected the participants’ experiences (Clark & Creswell, 2008). Because the quality of the study depends on the validity and reliability of the data, it is important to ensure that the results “measure what they intend to measure” (Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 210) and “the scores received from

participants [are] consistent over time (Clark & Creswell, 2008, p. 211). An audit of my analysis by a team of colleagues with no vested interest ensured that others arrive at the same inferences about the data (see Appendix A).

Qualitative data analysis

Data collected during the qualitative focus group interview phase is a combination of voice recordings and my handwritten notes. Creswell and Clark (2011) explain, “Exploring data in a qualitative data analysis involves reading through all of the data to develop a general understanding of the database. It means recording initial thoughts by writing short memos in the transcript or field notes . . . all forms of data are reviewed” (p. 207). Voice recordings were transcribed. As suggested by Creswell and Clark, extra-large margins in the transcripts allowed for codes (“the core feature of qualitative data analysis” [p. 208]) to be written directly in the margins. All data was coded and reorganized by theme and category and a qualitative codebook was developed. Both a priori and inductive coding were used. A priori codes include the racial microaggression categories of assaults, insults, and invalidations, as well as coding for trends in the data that fall under labeling and expectation theory. Additional codes were established during data analysis.

Strengths and Challenges of the Research Design

According to Creswell and Clark (2011), “the explanatory mixed methods design is the most straightforward of the mixed methods designs” (p. 83). Advantages include using a survey to collect quantitative data. The quantitative data collected in the first phase of the study appeals to quantitative researchers (Creswell & Clark, 2011), and analysis of the trends can be written separately from the qualitative section, providing clear delineation for readers

(Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 83). The two-phase structure of this study is an advantage. This design lent itself to an emergent approach where the second phase was designed based on what was learned from the initial quantitative phase. The preliminary analysis of the survey data revealed trends that were used to formulate questions for the focus group. Another advantage of the research design is that I was the sole researcher for this study; a research team was not needed. Therefore, carrying out this study did not rely on the coordination of schedules (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 83).

My first attempt at collecting surveys from students resulted in about 60 completed and submitted surveys. The representation among the four racial groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian and white) were grossly uneven and not representative of a large urban public school district in the Northeast region of the United States. To remedy this, I extended the data collection window to an additional year. I solicited the support of my network and visited after school programs as well as summer camp sessions to increase the number and racial representation of survey participants to 95.

There were challenges to carrying out the qualitative focus group phase of the study where I planned to ask students to elaborate on what I anticipated were going to be noticeable differences in classroom learning experiences between the racial groups. However, across racial groups, many of the item responses were more similar than not, therefore there were fewer questions to present to the focus groups than originally intended. Another challenge was the 90-minute time limit for the focus group. The questions that were selected to present to the focus group needed to be unambiguous and allow four to five students to share and discuss their classroom experiences in such a way that impact could be gleaned from their remarks. With fewer questions to choose from, it was unclear to me whether I had enough or

the “right” data to present to participants. Another challenge I faced included finding a time and location that was accessible for all participants and provided a quiet space that would be free from background noise and/or distractions for the audio recording. For the middle grades focus group, students were dropped off by their parents which required coordinating a time and location that was convenient for 5 families (there were 2 sets of siblings in the middle school focus group). For the high school focus groups, there were similar location challenges; however, the time of day and day of the week were more challenging for this group and required several attempts. In the end, what was originally planned as one focus group for high school became two groups to accommodate students’ schedules. Lastly, a challenge of this mixed methods design was that as the sole researcher, I was the only person responsible for data collection, analysis, and synthesis (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 85), processes that were significantly laborious.

Conclusion

A sequential mixed methods design was chosen to provide multiple ways to view and understand the classroom learning experiences of Black students in comparison to their other-raced peers. This method lends itself to providing a more in-depth understanding of students’ experiences, because after collecting quantitative data the preliminary results were shared with students and they were asked to share their personal accounts and understandings to further elaborate on the experiences of Black students attending school in or near a large urban school district in the northeast region of the United States. Data collection for this research method was labor intensive for a sole researcher, as was data analysis. However, the depth with which I have gained a better understanding of students’ experiences has provided

me with the confirmation needed to strongly suggest that further research be conducted on a larger scale to better understand how Black students experience classroom learning in order to understand the practical steps required to close the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers. More on next steps and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter 5. Next, in Chapter 4, analyzed data for the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study are presented.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

After decades of reform the achievement gap between Black students and their white peers across socio economic backgrounds has persisted. The often-discussed factors such as poverty, uninvolved parents, and unmotivated students are symptoms of a larger problem. It is my opinion that these factors are overemphasized and circumvent the greater impact of institutionalized racism and the influence this has on teacher perceptions and student learning experiences. This study sought to hear directly from students about their classroom learning experiences in an effort to centralize the voices of the students who are living their learning experience.

As such, a sequential mixed methods study was conducted to determine whether a significant difference exists between the reported classroom learning experiences of Black students and their other-raced peers. My intention was that if both the survey and focus groups revealed that a significant difference exists among students' expressed experiences in the classroom, I could confidently advise that racial microaggressions be considered an critical factor that warrants further research to better understand the K–12 learning experiences of Black students in relation to the persistent academic achievement gap between themselves and their other-raced peers. The quantitative and qualitative findings of this study are presented in this chapter and discussed in Chapter 5.

This sequential mixed methods study consisted of two phases: a quantitative online survey phase and a qualitative focus group phase. Both phases of the study were open to

students in middle and high school attending schools in or near a large urban public school district in the northeastern region of the United States. The online survey was created using a modified format and restructuring of questions from an existing student-centered school climate survey (American Institutes for Research, 2010). The online survey consisted of 33 questions, 18 of which were about students' perceptions of their classroom learning experiences. Students responded to these questions using a 4-point Likert scale that included strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). As mentioned before, a four-point scale was chosen instead of a five-point scale to mitigate the over-selection of a neutral response.

In the quantitative, online-survey phase there were 95 student participants who self-identified as male or female (in conversation after completing the survey one student identified as non-gender binary). Students also identified their current grade level and their race before responding to 18 statements about their classroom learning experiences. This chapter reports the results of the quantitative and qualitative phases. An interpretation and discussion of the results in relation to the research questions follows in Chapter 5.

The following figures are shows how each of the 18 survey statements were coded for analysis as well as how each statement aligns with indicators identified in the literature for general classroom learning experiences, experiences racial microaggression, racial battle fatigue and self-efficacy.

Statement Codes	Survey Statements
<i>Grades</i>	Getting good grades in school is within my control.
<i>Help</i>	I can get help for any class when I need it.
<i>Mistreated</i>	I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers.
<i>Like</i>	In some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher does not like me.
<i>Trouble</i>	I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble.
<i>More trouble</i>	I worry about getting in more trouble than other students.
<i>Energized</i>	I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes.
<i>Headaches</i>	I get headaches in certain classes.
<i>Stomach ache</i>	I get stomach aches in certain classes.
<i>Teachers believe</i>	Most of my teachers believe I will be successful.
<i>Less serious</i>	I take class less seriously if the teacher does not look like me.
<i>Same race</i>	Most of my teachers have been my same race?
<i>Doesn't matter</i>	It doesn't matter to me whether my teacher is my same race.
<i>Books</i>	Most of the books I have read in school have been about main characters that are my same race.
<i>Conversations</i>	I have had teachers who encourage respectful conversations about race and racism.
<i>Life success</i>	Being successful in life is within my control.
<i>Job</i>	I believe getting a good job after high school/ college is within my control.
<i>Enough money</i>	Earning enough money to take care myself after high school/ college is within my control.

Figure 3. List of codes used for statistical analysis.

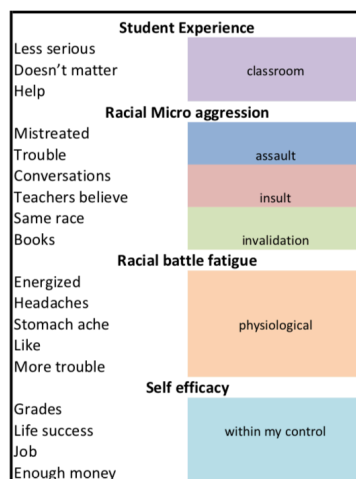


Figure 4. Coded survey statements and associated indicators.

The 18 survey statement codes were categorized according to the associated indicators for general classroom learning experiences, experiences with racial microaggression, and experiences with racial battle fatigue and self-efficacy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the quantitative online survey phase of the study consisted of a one-way ANOVA test. One-way ANOVA tests are conducted for variables with more than one group when investigating the mean differences between independent variables (race) and contextual classroom learning experience variables.

The assumptions underlying this test are (1) the observations are random and independent samples from the grade 6–12 student group populations; (2) normal distributions of the populations from which the samples are selected are evident; (3) variance of the distributions in the populations are equal. The independent variables consist of two or more categorically independent groups; the data satisfied this assumption because survey takers represent four racial groups: Black, Hispanic, Asian, and white. There is no relationship between the observations in each group or between the groups themselves. This means there are no data points in which participants were in multiple groups at any time. There are no significant outliers, and there was no significant variance among participant responses. The data obtained for this test are from an independent simple random sample. All quantitative analyses were planned based on the research question:

- Is there a statistically significant difference between the reported classroom learning experiences of Black students and any of their other-raced peers?

As a reminder the hypotheses being tested were:

The null hypothesis:

- There is no significant difference in students' perceptions of their classroom learning experiences in the different racial groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian, white).

The alternative hypothesis:

- There is a significant difference in the perceptions of students about their classroom learning experiences in the different racial groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian, white).

In the quantitative online phase of the analysis, students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds were invited to take part in the online survey. Of the 95 students who participated in the online survey, 4 submissions were excluded from the analysis because fewer than 10 of the 33 questions were answered.

Findings: Quantitative Analysis Phase

Students in grades 6–12 attending school in or near a large urban school district in the northeastern United States were invited to participate in the quantitative (online survey) phase of the study. In this phase of the study, students were presented with several statements associated with the indicators of racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue, such as “I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers” or “Most of the books I have read in school have been about main characters that are my same race” or “I get headaches in certain classes.”

Descriptive analysis

Of the 95 surveys submitted 43% of the survey takers were male and 53% were in high school. In other words, there was nearly equal male-female participation as well as middle/ high school participation. As shown in Table 1 below, the total number of middle school participants was 44, and the total number of high school participants were 51.

Online Survey								
95 surveys submitted *								
Gender		Grade						
female	male	sixth	seventh	eighth	ninth	tenth	eleventh	twelfth
54	41	19	12	13	8	21	4	18

*4 surveys were excluded from analysis surveys due to fewer than 10 questions answered

Figure 5. Descriptive statistics for middle & high school survey participants by grade.

Racial demographics of study participants

Of the 95 students who participated in this study 40% of the participants identified as Black. There were 17 participants who identified as Asian, 16 of these students were in middle school, 1 student was in high school. 57% of the participants were students in high school. The representation of race among middle school and high school participants was fairly equal making the results of the survey reliable as it relates to grade band representation.

	Grade								
	sixth	seventh	eighth	ninth	tenth	eleventh	twelfth	Total	Percent
	17	11	13	7	21	4	18	95	~ 100%
Black Hispanic Asian white	5	4	6	3	8	3	8	37	40%
	1	0	0	3	6	1	2	13	14%
	6	4	6	0	0	0	1	17	18%
	5	3	1	1	7	0	7	23	26%

Figure 6: Descriptive statistics for middle & high school survey participants by race & grade.

One-way ANOVA analysis

ANOVA compares the amount of variation between groups, with the amount of variation within groups. In this study the between group comparison is Black student responses compared to the responses of each of the other three races separately. The within

group variation refers to the variation of responses within the same racial group. The amount of variation determines whether there is a statistically significant differences of means among more than two groups. For this study there were thirteen indicator statement for which there was no statistically significant difference between how Black students responded in comparison to their other-raced peers. There were five indicators statements for which there was a statistically significant differences between how black students responded in comparison to their other-raced peers.

Statistically significant differences are based on a p-value greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$). The p-value represents the level of marginal significance within a statistical hypothesis test. A p-value greater than 0.05 indicates no significance and the null hypothesis is accepted, whereas a p-value that is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) represents statistical significance and the null hypothesis is rejected. Further, a p-value that is less than 0.001 ($p < 0.001$) represents high statistical significance. In the following section the survey results will be organized by the four categories for classroom learning experiences along with the associated p-value scores.

Of the 18 classroom learning experience statements the analysis revealed there was no statistically significant difference between how Black students responded compared to how their other-raced peers responded to 13 of the 18 statements. These will be categorized and presented first, followed by a presentation of the 5 statements the analysis revealed a statistically significant difference among students' responses.

No statistical significance

For the following statements of students' reported classroom learning experiences, the indicators with no statistically significant difference between the response rate for Black students and their other-raced peers are: Less Serious, Help, Mistreated, Teachers Believe, Books, Energized, Stomach ache, Like, More Trouble, Grade, Life Success, Job and Enough Money. Below, each of these statements are categorized according to the associated indicators for general classroom learning experiences, experiences with racial microaggression and experiences with racial battle fatigue and self-efficacy.

Classroom learning

For the following statements of students' reported classroom learning experiences, the indicators with no statistically significant difference between the response rate for Black students and their other-raced peers are "I take class less seriously if the teacher does not look like me," "I can get help for any class when I need it," "I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers," "most of my teachers believe I will be successful," "most of the books I have read in school have been about main characters that are my same race," "I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes," "I get stomach aches in certain classes," "In some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher doesn't like me," "I worry about getting in more trouble than other students," "getting good grades in school is within my control," "being successful in life is within my control," "I believe getting a good job after high school/ college is within my control" and "earning enough money to take care of myself after high school/ college is within my control." Below each of these statements are categorized according to the associated indicators for general classroom

learning experiences, experiences with racial microaggression and experiences with racial battle fatigue and self-efficacy.

Table 1. Summary of Less Serious Descriptive Statistics

Less Serious	N	M	SD		
Black	36	2.2	.92		
Hispanic	13	2.3	.76		
Asian	17	1.6	.60		
white	23	1.9	1.00		
Summary ANOVA of Less Serious					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	5.45	3	1.81	2.33	0.07
Within Groups	66.13	85	0.77		
Total	71.59	88			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “I take class less seriously if the teacher does not look like me.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 1. As shown in table 1, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I take class less seriously if the teacher does not look like me” $F(3, 85) = .079, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.2$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.3$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 1.6$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 1.9$). with the statement “I take class less seriously if the teacher does not look like me.”

Table 2. Summary of Help Descriptive Statistics

Help	N	M	SD		
Black	37	3.2	.75		
Hispanic	13	3.07	.64		
Asian	17	3.17	.52		
white	24	3.2	.72		
Summary ANOVA of Help					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	0.202	3	0.06	.14	.93
Within Groups	41.62	87	0.47		
Total	41.82	90			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “I can get help for any class when I need it.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 2. As shown in table 2, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I can get help for any class when I need it” $F(3, 87) = .935, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 3.2$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3.07$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.17$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.2$).

These survey results suggest that Black students are not experiencing classroom learning differently than their other-raced peers as it relates to taking class less seriously if the teacher does not look like them or getting help when they need it

Racial microaggressions

For statements associated with experiences with racial microaggressions coded as “Mistreated,” which is an indicator of a micro assault, “Teachers Believe” an indicator of a micro insult (i.e.), and “Books” which is an indicator micro invalidation the p-values were greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), therefore there were no statistically significant differences between the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers. However, as reported

below, Black and Hispanic students seem to disagree with the statement “they have never worried about being mistreated by their teachers,” whereas Asian and white students tend to agree with the statement. A discussion of this difference related to school discipline policies is discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 3. Summary of Mistreated Descriptive Statistics

Mistreated	N	M	SD		
Black	37	2.7	.99		
Hispanic	13	2.4	.96		
Asian	17	3.2	1.60		
white	24	3	.82		
Summary ANOVA of Mistreated					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	6.25	3	2.08	1.68	.17
Within Groups	107.42	87	1.23		
Total	113.67	90			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 3. As shown in table 3, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers” $F(3, 87) = .176, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.7$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.4$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.2$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3$).

Table 4. Summary of Teachers Believe Descriptive Statistics

Teachers Believe	N	M	SD		
Black	36	3.2	.61		
Hispanic	13	3.1	.68		
Asian	17	3.1	.52		
white	23	3.1	.88		
Summary ANOVA of Teachers Believe					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	0.254	3	0.08	.17	0.91
Within Groups	40.68	85	0.47		
Total	40.94	88			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “most of my teachers believe I will be successful.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 4. As shown in table 4, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “most of my teachers believe I will be successful” $F(3, 85) = .912, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.5$).

Table 5. Summary of Books Descriptive Statistics

Books	N	M	SD		
Black	35	1.9	.80		
Hispanic	13	1.9	.64		
Asian	17	2	.61		
white	23	2.2	.81		
Summary ANOVA of Books					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	1.65	3	0.55	.98	0.4
Within Groups	47.24	84	0.56		
Total	48.89	87			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “most of the books I have read in school have been about

main characters that are my same race.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 5. As shown in table 5, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “most of the books I have read in school have been about main characters that are my same race” $F(3, 84) = .406, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 1.9$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 1.9$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 2$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2.2$).

The survey results for these statements suggest Black students are not experiencing classroom learning differently. With regard to experiences with racial microaggressions for these statements Black students responded similar to their other-raced peers. In other words, survey results suggest that classroom experiences based on Black students’ encounters with their teachers seem to not indicate that Black students worry about being mistreated. Further, results suggest that Black students agree that most of their teachers believe they will be successful, and that Black students have read books about main characters that are their same race.

Racial battle fatigue

For statements associated with the physiological symptoms of experiences with racial battle fatigue, “I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes,” “I get a stomach ache in certain classes,” “In some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher doesn’t like me,” and “I worry about getting in more trouble than other students,” the p-values for responses among all four racial groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian and white) were greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), therefore the null hypothesis was maintained there were no

statistically significant differences between how Black students and their other-raced peers responded to theses statement.

Table 6. Summary of Energized Descriptive Statistics

Energized	N	M	SD		
Black	36	2.8	.65		
Hispanic	13	2.6	.76		
Asian	17	3	.61		
white	23	2.6	.97		
Summary ANOVA of Energized					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	1.41	3	0.47	.81	0.48
Within Groups	48.94	85	0.57		
Total	50.36	88			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes.”

The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained.

Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 6. As shown in table 6, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes” $F(3, 85) = .487, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.8$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.6$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2.6$).

Table 7. Summary of Stomach Ache Descriptive Statistics

Stomach Ache	N	M	SD		
Black	36	2.3	.92		
Hispanic	13	2.6	.76		
Asian	17	1.8	.63		
white	23	2	.94		
Summary ANOVA of Stomach Ache					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	5.34	3	1.78	2.40	0.07
Within Groups	63.01	86	0.74		
Total	68.36	88			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “I get stomach aches in certain classes.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 7. As shown in table 7, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I get stomach aches in certain classes” $F(3, 85) = .073, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.2$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.6$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 1.8$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2$).

Table 8. Summary of Like Descriptive Statistics

Like	N	M	SD		
Black	37	2.4	.86		
Hispanic	13	2.3	.86		
Asian	17	2.2	.91		
white	23	2.4	.87		
Summary ANOVA of Like					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	0.22	3	0.07	.09	0.96
Within Groups	66.39	86	0.77		
Total	66.62	89			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “In some classes I worry I will not get good grades

because my teacher doesn't like me." The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 8. As shown in table 8, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement "In some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher doesn't like me" $F(3, 86) = .961, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.4$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.3$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 2.2$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2.3$).

Table 9. Summary of More Trouble Descriptive Statistics

More Trouble	N	M	SD		
Black	37	2.6	.89		
Hispanic	13	2.6	.63		
Asian	17	2.3	.86		
white	23	2	1.00		
Summary ANOVA of More Trouble					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	5.76	3	1.93	2.36	0.07
Within Groups	70.31	86	0.81		
Total	76.1	89			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement "I worry about getting in more trouble than other students." The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 9. As shown in table 9, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement "I worry about getting in more trouble than other students," $F(3, 86) = .077, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.6, SD = 0.89$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.6$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 2.3$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2$).

The survey results for 4 out of 5 of these statements associated with experiences of racial battle fatigue suggest that Black students are not experiencing racial battle fatigue differently than their other-raced peers. With regard to the statements “I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes,” “I get a stomach ache in certain classes,” “in some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher doesn’t like me,” and “I worry about getting in more trouble than other students,” Black students responded similar to their other-raced peers. These results suggest that for these indicator statements symptoms of racial battle fatigue do not appear to be experienced more among Black students than among their other-raced peers.

Self-efficacy

For statements associated with students’ perceptions that they have control of their success coded as “getting good grades in school is within my control,” “being successful in life is within my control,” “I believe getting a good job after high school/ college is within my control,” and “earning enough money to take care of myself after high school/ college is within my control.” For these statement indicators associated with self-efficacy the difference in responses between Black students and their other-raced peers were not statistically significant, the p-values were greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$).

Table 10. Summary of Grades Descriptive Statistics

Grades	N	M	SD		
Black	37	3.3	.62		
Hispanic	13	3.3	.63		
Asian	17	3.6	.49		
white	24	3.2	.69		
Summary ANOVA of Grades					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	1.59	3	0.52	1.25	0.26
Within Groups	33.71	87	0.38		
Total	35.29	90			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “getting good grades in school is within my control.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 10. As shown in table 10, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “getting good grades in school is within my control,” $F(3, 81) = .261, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.6$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.2$).

Table 11. Summary of Life Success Descriptive Statistics

Life Success	N	M	SD		
Black	35	3.3	.59		
Hispanic	13	3	.81		
Asian	16	3.3	.88		
white	22	3.5	.74		
Summary ANOVA of Life Success					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	2.11	3	0.7	1.33	0.27
Within Groups	43.42	82	0.53		
Total	45.53	85			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “being successful in life is within my control.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 11. As shown in table 11, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “being successful in life is within my control,” $F(3, 82) = .270, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.5$).

Table 12. Summary of Job Descriptive Statistics

Job	N	M	SD		
Black	34	3.4	.56		
Hispanic	13	3.2	.43		
Asian	16	3.5	.51		
white	22	3.5	.73		
Summary ANOVA of Job					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	1	3	0.33	.96	0.41
Within Groups	28.17	81	0.34		
Total	29.17	84			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “I believe getting a good job after high school/ college is within my control.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 12. As shown in table 12, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I believe getting a good job after high school/ college is within my control,” $F(3, 81) = .414$, $p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 3.4$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3.2$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.5$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.5$).

Table 13. Summary of Enough Money Descriptive Statistics

Enough Money	N	M	SD		
Black	34	3.4	.66		
Hispanic	13	3.07	.86		
Asian	16	3.3	.60		
white	22	3.5	.59		
Summary ANOVA of Enough Money					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	1.71	3	0.57	1,27	0.28
Within Groups	36.24	81	0.44		
Total	37.95	84			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were no significant differences in student responses to the statement “earning enough money to take care of myself after high

school/ college is within my control.” The p value was greater than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 13. As shown in table 13, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “earning enough money to take care of myself after high school/ college is within my control,” $F(3, 81) = .289, p > .05$. The mean values for Black students and their other-raced peers was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 3.4$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3.07$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.3$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.5$).

These results suggest that Black students feel similarly about the control they have over their present and future life success when compared to their other-raced peers who took part in this survey. experiences

In summary, for 13 statements associated with students’ reported classroom learning experiences with racial microaggression and racial battle fatigue as well as their perception of their control over their life success the null hypothesis was accepted. In other words, for these indicators classroom learning experiences there is no significant difference among students’ reported perceptions across the racial groups Black, Hispanic, Asian, and white. In other words, these findings suggest Black students do not feel mistreated by their teachers, are able to get help when they need it, do not seem to worry about being liked by their teachers. Black students also did not report taking class less seriously if their teacher isn’t their same race and they agreed with the statement that their teachers believe in them and their potential to be successful.

Statistically significant statement responses

Statistically significant differences did exist between Black students and their other-raced peers related to their classroom learning experiences for five indicator statements

associated with students reported classroom learning, experiences with racial microaggression and racial battle fatigue. These statistically significant differences are based on a p-value less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$).

For five of the 18 statements, the quantitative data analysis revealed there was a statistically significant difference in how Black students responded to questions about their classroom learning experiences in comparison to their other-raced peers based on a p-value less than 0.05. For two of these five indicator statements there was a high statistically significant difference based on a p-value less than 0.001 ($p < 0.001$). The next section presents the indicator statements for which the responses are statically significant.

Table 14. Summary of Doesn't Matter Descriptive Statistics

Doesn't Matter	N	M	SD		
Black	36	2.2	1.00		
Hispanic	13	2.8	.55		
Asian	17	3.5	.61		
white	23	3.8	.38		
Summary ANOVA of Doesn't Matter					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	14.31	3	4.77	8.09	0.00
Within Groups	50.08	85	0.589		
Total	64.4	88			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in Table 14. As shown in table 14, the ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “it doesn’t matter to me whether my teacher is my same race” $F(3, 85) = .000$, $p < .01$. The mean values for Black students was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.9$ vs. $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.8$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.5$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.8$).

Table 15. Summary of Trouble Descriptive Statistics

Trouble	N	M	SD		
Black	37	2.7	1.00		
Hispanic	13	2.9	.86		
Asian	17	2.9	.93		
white	23	1.8	.91		
Summary ANOVA of Trouble					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	14.23	3	4.74	5.21	0.002
Within Groups	78.22	86	0.91		
Total	92.45	89			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were significant differences in student responses to the statement of “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble.” The p value was less than 0.01, and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 15. As shown in table 15, the ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble” $F(3,86) = .002$, $p < .01$. The mean values for Black student was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.7$ vs. $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.9$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 2.9$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 1.8$).

Table 16. Summary of Conversations Descriptive Statistics

Conversations	N	M	SD		
Black	35	2.8	.66		
Hispanic	13	2.8	.68		
Asian	17	3.1	.80		
white	23	3.3	.71		
Summary ANOVA of Conversations					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	4.54	3	1.52	3.00	0.035
Within Groups	42.35	84	0.5		
Total	46.89	87			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were significant differences in student responses to the statement of “I have had teachers who encourage respectful,

conversations about race and racism.” The p value was less than 0.05, therefore the null hypotheses was rejected. The descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in table 5. As shown in table 5, the ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I have had teachers who encourage respectful, conversations about race and racism” $F(3, 84) = .035, p < .01$. The mean values for Black student was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.8$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 2.8$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 3.1$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 3.3$).

Table 17. Summary of Same Race Descriptive Statistics

Same Race	N	M	SD		
Black	36	1.8	.98		
Hispanic	13	1.6	.63		
Asian	17	1.6	.49		
white	23	2.7	.67		
Summary ANOVA of Same Race					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	18.78	3	6.26	10.19	0.00
Within Groups	52.2	85	0.61		
Total	50.98	88			

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were significant differences in student responses to the statement of “most of my teachers have been my same race.” The p value was less than 0.01, and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in Table 17. As shown in table 17, the ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant different in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “most of my teachers have been my same race” $F(3, 85) = .000, p < .01$. The mean values for Black student was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 1.8$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 1.6$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 1.6$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2.7$).

Table 18. Summary of Headaches Descriptive Statistics

Headaches	N	M	SD		
Black	36	2.8	.87		
Hispanic	13	3.1	.68		
Asian	17	2.2	.83		
white	23	2.8	.98		
Summary ANOVA of Headaches					
Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F	p
Between Groups	6.89	3	2.33	3.04	0.03
Within Groups	65.05	85	0.76		
Total	72.04	88			
*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001					

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

The ANOVA analysis results indicated that there were significant differences in student responses to the statement of “I get headaches in certain classes.” The p value was less than 0.05, and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in Table 18. As shown in table 18, the ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant difference in the responses of Black students and their other-raced peers for the statement “I get headaches in certain classes” $F(3, 85) = .033, p < .05$. The mean values for Black student was ($M_{\text{Black}} = 2.8$ vs $M_{\text{Hispanic}} = 3.1$ vs $M_{\text{Asian}} = 2.2$ vs $M_{\text{white}} = 2.8$).

In the next section I present the qualitative findings of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study. I discuss in Chapter 5 some of the existing literature related to teacher preparation to present possible reasons for why Black students are experiencing classroom learning more differently than their other-raced peers and what these differences suggest about any changes that need to be made to address the persistent academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers.

Findings: Qualitative Analysis Phase

The qualitative phase consisted of three focus groups of 4-7 students each. The focus groups were conducted with students who (1) self-identified as Black and (2) indicated their interest in taking part in the focus group (this was one of the online survey questions). The participants consisted of a total of 16 male and female students, in middle and high school, and who attended schools in or near a large urban public school in the northeastern region of the United States. Focus groups were held separately for middle school and high school students at two community centers. The middle and high school focus groups were separate to provide a space where students would feel comfortable discussing their classroom learning experiences with peers who in the same grade band. There was one focus group for students in middle school attended by 7 students (3 males, 4 females in grades 6 through 8) and two focus groups for high school students, one with 5 female high school students and the other with 4 male high school students. While it was intentional that the middle and high school focus groups were held separately, it was not intentional that the high school focus group were separated by sex. This separation, amongst the high school group was a result of participants' availability to attend the focus group sessions.

The focus group with students in middle school was held first, in June of 2018. At the start of the session the purpose of the study was explained, and students were given time to read and sign the student assent forms. The group was then shown a visual of the achievement gap (see Appendix F), a sample of the types of questions that were asked in the online survey (as a reminder), and bar graphs of participant answers for the following contextual variables: “doesn’t matter,” “conversations,” “same race,” and “headaches.” This discussion was then followed up with questions about students’ perceptions of their

classroom learning experiences, including: What is it like being a student? What have your classroom learning experiences been like? Has your race impacted your learning experiences? The middle school and high school focus group data will be presented separately, and the data will be organized in the same order as the protocol. See Appendix F for the focus group protocol.

Demographics of focus group participants

All of the focus group participants identified as Black. Of the 16 focus group participants 38% were male and 56% were high school students. There was at least one student representative for each grade in the middle school focus group. In the high school focus groups, there were no ninth-grade student participants. There was equal representation of middle and high school of their classroom learning experiences.

<i>Three focus group meetings</i>	Focus Groups								
	<i>Gender</i>		<i>Grade</i>						
	female	male	sixth	seventh	eighth	ninth	tenth	eleventh	twelfth
Middle school	5	2	4	2	1	0	0	0	0
High school **	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2
High school ***	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	1	3

** all female

*** all male

Figure 7. Descriptive statistics for middle and high school focus group participants by grade.

Focus group with middle grades

Achievement gap graphs. There were seven participants in the middle school focus group. When students were shown the achievement, gap graphs (Appendix F), their reactions appeared to be indifferent. They had not seen any of the graphs before. When I explained how to read the graphs and what the different symbols on the graphs meant, participants

commented about the graph line for Asian students: “They always do better than everyone else” (student participant) followed by laughter. Because these focus groups were designed with the intention of hearing directly from Black students about their classroom learning experiences and perception of the data, I refrained from a tangential discussions about social messages that lead us to believe that whole groups of people, Asians in this case, are innately gifted academically. I did offer my teaching experiences with a largely Asian population of students and my discovery that, just like other groups of students I have taught, there were struggling learners, high achievers, and students on grade level (Lee, 2009). My overall intention in sharing this message with students was to provide them with a different perspective of their Asian peers other than that of “always doing better than everyone else” based on my years of experience teaching students of different backgrounds and knowing that there is a variability within all racial groups related to academic achievement.

“What is it like being a student?” When students were asked about their classroom learning experiences, 5 of the 7 students talked about getting in trouble in class. When students were asked whether they thought they got in “more trouble” than other-raced students, 3 said “no,” 2 were unsure, and 2 did not answer. When students were asked why they thought they got in trouble, one male student responded that it was because “class is so boring”; others in the focus group nodded. Other students shared “because the teacher doesn’t know how to teach.” There were no nods. For students in this middle grade’s focus group the examples they shared of “getting in trouble” included getting in trouble for talking to peers during independent work time and “clowning around.”

“What have your classroom learning experiences been like?” When students were asked about the extent to which they thought they were treated differently by their teachers in

comparison to their other-raced peers, most of the group looked confused and four students shook their head to indicate “no” as their answer to this question. When I asked if students thought their race had anything to do with why they got in trouble, all but one student responded emphatically “No, you can’t do that! ... teachers can’t be racist!” One student offered “When I get in trouble it’s because I was being a class clown” and another said, “I always talk to whoever is sitting near me when I finish my work. I talk a lot.” The one student who did not respond is the same student who shared that they get in trouble because the teacher doesn’t know how to teach. This student’s participation in the focus group was noticeably different than the other students in this middle grade’s focus group. She appeared a bit agitated by some of the questions, and was definitely agitated when the other students said, “teachers can’t be racist.” When I probed this student to share what she was thinking, her only response was directed at another participant in this group: “She [another participant] doesn’t know, because she’s small and everyone thinks she’s cute ... but I know.” My interpretation of this student’s response is that she is aware that teachers do treat students differently sometimes based on their race, but it appeared in this case that this student was also implying that teachers treat students differently when they are “small and cute.” Though I attempted to probe further, the student did not elaborate.

“Has your race impacted your learning experiences?” Students in the middle school focus group did not mention race or racism in their interpretations for why Black students report significantly different classroom learning experiences than their other-raced peers. When students were shown the survey results for “Most of my teachers have been my same race,” 3 of the students noted having teachers that were their same race (Black). When students were asked if they agreed with the statement “It doesn’t matter to me if my teacher

is my same race,” students responded that it does not matter if their teacher is also Black. One student shared, “It doesn’t matter what race the teacher is if they are a good teacher.” When I asked, “What makes a good teacher?” the student responded, “she’s not boring.” When students were asked if their teachers have had conversations about race in class, a student shared, “We don’t talk about race stuff.” When students were asked if they get headaches in class, a student shared, “I don’t actually get headaches in class, but I say I do so I can go to the nurse, she has good snacks.” Two other students nodded in agreement and giggled. For the students in this middle grade focus group students’ responses suggest that these students do not attribute their race is impacting their classroom learning experiences. Students in this focus group did not share examples of being treated differently because of their race, rather students in this focus group shared examples that justified the times they had gotten in trouble being due to their off-task (“talking to peers”) or distracting behavior (“clowning around”).

Focus group with high school grades

Achievement gap graphs. Similar to the middle school focus group, high school students were unfamiliar with the achievement gap displayed as graph. However, they were vaguely familiar with the discourse on student achievement because of their experiences with state testing. Although high school students were only vaguely familiar with the achievement gap discourse, they revealed a general awareness that Black and Hispanic students do not do as well as Asian and white students in school. When asked what they thought about the graph and student achievement discourse, both high school groups were similarly indifferent. I interpret this indifference to suggest that the high school students in these focus groups were not concerned about this data which may be due to the fact that the data that was presented to

them was an abstract context for them that did not specifically relate to their own academic achievement. The responses in both groups seemed to suggest that students were not sure how to respond to my asking what they thought about the achievement gap. When I reminded them there are no wrong answers, I was met with shrugs and blank stares.

“What is it like being a student?” When students were asked what it is like being a Black student, 5 out of 9 shared that they had attended different types of school since elementary and had noticed differences between their experiences in public school and private or parochial school experiences. One student noted, “from the private school I can say they taught me like advanced things at a young age, like cursive and Spanish.” In this group a student added on, “Yeah, and they gave us harder problems than normal average third graders would get, like yeah, I can see the difference now. And they taught us more discipline.” Another student shared that when he was in elementary school, he also went to a private school and always got in trouble, being separated from the group for being off-task. He shared that he felt he was being picked on by his teacher. When the question of his race came up, he shared that he has very light skin and didn’t believe his race was the reason for getting in trouble. He further explained that he still gets in trouble more than other students “because people are jealous of me, even adults. . . . I have questions about why we are doing this work and I keep asking.” Another student referred to her experience in a Catholic elementary school: “It was very strict and there was always a lot of work, and you had to do it.” She then compared that experience to her experience in her current public school: “I barely get homework, and I’m not complaining. I just notice that was a big difference for me.” When I probed to find out whether she thought the different experience had anything to do with race, this student referenced a family member who attends school in the “burbs”

(suburbs): “My cousin goes to school in [small town] and always has homework or a project or something. Yeah, that’s different, but he also complains of how racist it is out there.”

Students in the high school focus group, shared examples of not getting the same kinds of challenging assignments or being held to the same high expectation in their public school in comparison to when they attended private or parochial school in elementary school. Students in this group shared examples of “barely getting homework” and comparing the frequency of assignments to the experiences of a cousin attending school in the suburbs. The examples provided by students in the high school focus group suggest that students are aware of a difference in the amount of work they receive in their current public schools not being at the same level of rigor as their elementary school experiences or that of family members attending school in the suburbs.

“Has your race impacted your learning experiences?” When students in the high school focus groups were asked to respond to the survey statement “it doesn’t matter if my teacher is my same race,” students did not agree with the statement. One of the male students shared that he had never had a Black teacher or any other race [except white] until high school, “but still, most of my teachers have been white.”

When I asked students if they thought it makes a difference if they have teachers that are their same race, a female student shared, “I don’t think it makes a difference, but all the students are Black or Spanish (a reference to the primary language spoken or nationality) and all the teachers—okay, most of the teachers are white, why?” One of the female students shared:

I would like my teacher to be more like me, so if she is Hispanic she can just call my mom, and even though my mom speaks English, she could understand better if the

teacher could speak Spanish, because now when my teachers call home I get in trouble because she doesn't understand everything and thinks the teacher is calling for a bad reason.

Another student shared:

In my elementary school, my parents didn't know there was a Muslim teacher. And they were so proud and happy I was finally getting to see people who are like me teaching . . . So yes, I think some parents would be happy to see their own people teaching their students.

Similar to the survey results, where Blacks students' responses revealed they do not agree with the statement "it doesn't matter if my teacher is my same race," Black students in the focus group similarly disagreed with the statement and shared examples of only having a white teacher until high school. Students in the focus group further shared a belief that their parents would have an easier time communicating with teachers who shared their same ethnic backgrounds (Hispanic and Muslim).

"Has your race impacted your learning experiences?" When I asked the group if they recall any "racist" experiences in class, the students were visibly confused. When I rephrased and asked if they thought they were treated differently than their other-raced peers, a student responded, "There are only Black and Spanish students in my class, wait, I think in the whole school." Another offered, "Even when I was in elementary school there may have been one or two white students, but I'm a senior and there hasn't been a white student in my class since 10th grade. The one white boy in my 9th grade class transferred before 10th grade." High school students were revealing the rarity of being in class, or an entire school, with Asian and white peers since elementary school.

When students were asked if they “have had teachers who encourage respectful conversations about race and racism,” high school students responded that race does not come up much, with the following exceptions: one student recalled reading a book that had the “n-word” in it and “the student teacher said they were not going to skip over the word because they are in high school now and shouldn’t be laughing or making fun of anything. So, she was like very strict.” This same student went on to provide another example of students using “the n-word” as a greeting and being explicitly told “we don’t use that type of language in this class.” These two examples suggest that these high school students have had experiences where their teachers are facilitating respectful conversations about race and racism. There also appeared to be an appreciation for teachers who were “strict” and were clear about what is acceptable and not acceptable “we don’t use that type of language in this class.”

Another student responded:

Last year, some students were using the n-word and our teacher stopped them and sat down with them, well, with the class, to talk about where that word came from and why we shouldn’t use it and like the history about it and why she doesn’t agree, even if you’re using it as a greeting.

The discussion about teachers facilitating respectful conversations about race and racism centered around students observing their teachers either correcting their peers for using racial slurs or, in some cases, teachers ignoring the use of racial slurs. One student recalled being called a name right in front of her teacher and explained, “I was like, he heard, he had to have heard. That’s kind of rude that he didn’t say anything.” My interpretation of this student’s

example is that she appeared to be disappointed that her teacher had not intervened and corrected the offending student.

Mixed Methods Analysis

For this sequential mixed method study, focus group discussions were used to help interpret survey results. Presenting survey data results to focus group participants provided the opportunity for Black students on whom this study is focused on to share their lived experiences and interpretations of the survey results. This section analyzes key findings from the focus group discussions about the survey, as well as key findings from the focus group discussions that offered a new understanding of some of the unexpected survey results.

Focus group and survey results

The intention of the focus groups was to hear directly from Black students in order for them to provide their insights into the survey data results. When students in the focus group, all of whom self-identified as Black, were shown graphs of how students of different racial groups responded to the statistically significant survey results for the statement “Most of my teachers have been my same race,” focus group participants agreed with the results and also shared that many of them had not had a teacher of their same race since elementary school. This reality aligns with current national statistics that the majority of urban public school educators are white despite a majority population of students of color (Bryan, 2017; Milner & Tenore, 2010). In Chapter 5 I will discuss the possible implications of this reality that Black students are mostly taught by teachers who are not their same race.

For the indicator statement “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble,” focus group

participants in the middle school group did not agree with the race-based comparison, noting that they got into trouble for being off-task or “clowning around” when they finished their work. In the high school groups, participants did not make race-based comparisons but did share instances of questioning the “point of a lesson” and getting in trouble or getting in trouble for not being silent when the expectation was to learn independently. For the middle school focus group, there were students who were in classes with students of different races; however, participants who shared their experiences did not agree with the race-based comparison and took ownership for why they got into trouble when their other-raced peers who were doing the same thing did not. In the high school groups, students in each group shared that there were only Black and Hispanic students in their classes and therefore this may explain why they did not offer any race-based comparison. Nevertheless, these focus group findings are in line with the survey results because although the results were statistically significant between Black students and their other-raced peers, that difference was between strongly disagree and disagree.

Black students on average disagreed with the statement “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble,” while their white peers on average strongly disagreed with the statement. This was also true for the indicator statement “I worry about getting in more trouble than other students.” Black students who shared that there were only Black and Hispanic students in their classes revealed that they did not have a way to identify whether they were getting in more or less trouble than other students. This may possibly be because in a racially homogenous class all students are in fact being treated equally. Further focus group discussions revealed a reality that is not often discussed: that is, public schools have largely been resegregated, despite the

desegregation decree of 1954. Students attending school in public school districts can expect to attend schools that are largely racially homogenous, thus helping to explain why students who participated in the focus group found it challenging to compare their classroom learning experiences to their Asian and white peers.

When focus group participants were asked to share their interpretation of the survey results for the indicator statement “I have had teachers who encourage respectful conversations about race and racism,” on average Black students disagreed and their Asian and white peers agreed with the statement. Students in the middle school focus group shared that their teachers did not talk about race or racism. There was some disagreement in the high school focus group: some participants shared their experiences of teachers taking a firm position on acceptable language in their classrooms (e.g., immediately addressing race-based slurs and derogatory interactions between students in class) or the mature manner in which students would engage with texts that were racially charged. Other students shared examples of teachers who ignored exchanges between students when racial slurs were used even though it appeared obvious to students that the teacher was well within earshot.

For the indicator statement “It doesn’t matter to me whether my teacher is my same race,” focus group discussions were lively. High school focus group participants agreed with the survey results. In one of the high school focus groups, when students were asked to explain why they also disagreed with the statement, students explained that it seemed odd to them that most of the students were Black or Hispanic but most of the teachers were white. They shared that they did not believe the race of their teacher made a difference in terms of their academic success, but they did question why such a stark difference between students and teachers exists. An interpretation of this discussion about the race of classroom teachers

in comparison to their students exposed that students are aware and even question why the disparity exists. This finding between students being aware of a disparity but not connecting their classroom learning experiences with getting in more trouble than their other-raced peers, or rarely if ever being in class with other-raced peers, suggests a dissonance between students' experiences and their awareness, possibly due to a lack of language to describe these experiences. This suggests experiences with racial micro invalidation. Racial micro invalidation is experienced when students do not have teachers who share the same race (and culture) and/or do not encourage respectful conversations about race and racism (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In Chapter 5 I will further assert that the racial micro invalidation of racial representation of students in their teachers is a microaggression that sheds further light on why students in the focus group shared experiences of being penalized by their teachers for being off-task instead of being given supports or more rigorous work as needed.

Focus group discussions offer new perspectives

The focus group discussions provided an opportunity for students to share their interpretations of the results in which Black students' responses were statistically different than their other-raced peers and also offered a new perspective for analyzing the survey statements for which there was not a statistically significant difference between how Black students and their other-raced peers responded. I will discuss this next.

For the indicator statement "I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers," although statistical analysis did not reveal a statistically significant difference between how Black students and their other-raced peers responded to this question, the average response for Black students was disagree and the average response for their Asian and white peers was that they agreed with the statement. For Black students who took part in

the survey, there appeared to be an awareness of being mistreated that students in the focus groups did not name. This was surprising in light of the research on the disproportionate, subjective, and harsh disciplinary practices that Black and Hispanic students typically experience (Losen, Keith, Hodson, & Martinez, 2016). Although focus group participants were unable to make race-based comparisons because they were rarely in classes with Asian or white peers, the discussions did not reveal why participants did not agree that their race is related to why they get in trouble in class when they were off-task or doing the same things as other-raced peers, which would have been an example of mistreatment.

The following results were unexpected in that there are no statistically significant race-based differences between students' responses. For the indicator statement "Most of my teachers believe I will be successful," Black students and their other-raced peers agreed with the statement. For the indicator statement "In some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher doesn't like me," Black students and their other-raced peers disagreed with the statement. These results were unexpected due to school discipline and achievement studies that reveal Black students are disproportionately placed in special education (Blanchett, 2006). Black students are also dropping out of school at higher rates than their Asian and white peers (Fine, 1991, C. Phillips, 2017), and Black students are more harshly disciplined than their other-raced peers (Nance, 2016). The focus group discussion helped to put these surprising results into perspective.

When both the middle and high school focus groups were shown achievement gap graphs (see Appendix G), none of the groups were familiar with or moved by the implications of the data. It is their possible lack of awareness that is most revealing in this study, because it suggests that at the same time Black students believe their teacher believes

they will be successful and are not worried that they will earn low grades because their teacher does like them, they are overrepresented in special education classes and disproportionately disciplined for subjective classroom-related incidents (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Nance, 2016). Black students appear to be unaware of the implications of an achievement gap and how closely associated their futures are with the current academic underachievement data.

Students who participated in the focus group expressed, sometimes empathically, that their race did not have anything to do with why they were not being challenged academically or why they got in more trouble or worried about getting in trouble for doing the same things other students of a different race were doing. Students who participated in the focus group were also not familiar with the achievement gap graph that displays the gap between the academic achievement of Black students in comparison to their other-raced peers. However, the results of the focus group discussion suggest Black students are not aware of the persistent reports of underachievement for their racial group and may not have the language to describe negative classroom learning experiences that may in fact be race based and impacting their learning outcomes. This lack of awareness and inability of Black students to describe the raced nature of their classroom learning experiences and their association with racial microaggressions of assault, insult, and invalidation will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter reported the quantitative and qualitative findings of this sequential mixed methods study as well as how the qualitative phase helped in the interpretation of the

quantitative findings. The quantitative findings suggest a significant difference in the reported classroom learning experiences of Black students and their other-raced peers for the following indicator statements: “It doesn’t matter to me whether my teacher is my same race”; “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble”; “I have had teachers who encourage respectful, conversations about race and racism”; “Most of my teachers have been my same race”; and “I get headaches in certain classes.” Thus, the null hypothesis for these variables was rejected, revealing a significant difference among the responses to these statements for Black students in comparison to their other-raced peers.

A major goal of the qualitative phase of the study was to hear directly from students about their classroom learning experiences and how they interpreted and expounded on the quantitative survey results. For both the middle school and high school student focus groups, students did not name race or racism as directly impacting their classroom learning experiences. The next chapter offers analytical discussion of the findings of this study and presents the study’s implications and limitations.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

Urban public schools are labeled and classified in the literature and discourse as serving underprivileged children from single-family households living in crime-ridden communities of poverty (Anyon, 1997; Warren, 2014). Many of the labels attached to urban public schools (i.e. “at risk,” “underperforming,” and “turn around schools”) are required in order for the schools to be eligible for Title I federal funding, which is “financial assistance received by local educational agencies and schools with high percentages of children from low income families *to help ensure that all children meet challenging academic achievement standards*” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, para. 1, emphasis added). These labels come at a cost for both the school and especially the students being served. The costs include making it challenging to attract highly qualified teachers or diverse student population, which further isolates and exacerbates the disparities in schools thusly labeled. Historically, labeling practices in education have not helped to mitigate but rather the exacerbated the challenges of providing a high quality education to our highest need student populations by deterring highly qualified educators from working in and turning failing schools around (Anyon, 1997).

In urban public schools, labels are commonplace and permit outcomes such as chronic failure to be explained away as solely attributed to the unfortunate and insurmountable effects of poverty; effects such as single-parent households, parents’ level of education, high rates of crime in the neighborhoods students live in, etc. However, if the

dollars being spent are to “ensure that all children are meeting challenging academic achievement standards” (U. S. Department of Education, 2018, para. 1) then how can stakeholders—school administrators, teachers, families, students, local politicians, and community members—ignore that there is more to the persistence of the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers, than poverty?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the persistence of the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers. Using racial microaggressions as both a theoretical lens (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008) and an actual type of race-based school incidence to investigate the impact of implicit bias on students’ perceptions of their classroom learning experiences, I sought to determine whether Black students’ learning experiences were significantly different than those of their other-raced peers. The goal of this work was to present the classroom learning experiences of Black students in comparison to their other-raced peers in order to shed light on the far-reaching impacts of institutionalized racism and suggest the critical necessity of centralizing racism and implicit bias in all discourse related to closing the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers. In this chapter I answer the guiding research questions for this study to show that it is critical for racism and implicit bias to be centralized in any discourses related to the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers.

Research Questions

The quantitative research questions guiding this work were:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between how Black students report their experiences with racial microaggressions in comparison to their other-raced peers?
2. How do Black students' experience learning in their classrooms in comparison to their other-raced peers?
3. To what extent are the experiences of Blacks students correlated with indicators for racial battle fatigue?

The qualitative research questions guiding this work were:

1. Do the Black students who participate in the focus groups agree with the results of the survey?
2. How do Black students describe their own classroom learning experiences?
3. To what extent do students' experiences correlate with the terms *racial microaggression* and *racial battle fatigue*?
4. To what extent do Black students connect their classroom learning experiences to their academic performance?

A Discussion and Synthesis of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

As a reminder, the term “racial microaggression” describes the subtle but continuous assault, insult, and invalidation experienced by people of color at home (via media), school, work or during their leisure time (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). Implicit racial biases are “unconscious associations that do not necessarily align with one’s conscious beliefs” (Staats et al., 2015) but affect our understandings, actions and decisions. It was through these

lenses that this study was designed to investigate possible hidden causes of the persistent gap in academic achievement between Black students and their other-raced peers.

From this work it is my growing understanding that racism, implicit bias, and low expectations converge in classrooms, negatively impacting the learning experiences and outcomes for Black students. In the next section, I will answer each of the research questions by using the quantitative and qualitative findings as well as existing literature in my interpretations and discussion of this research.

Is there a statistically significant difference between how Black students report their experiences with racial microaggressions in comparison to their other-raced peers?

Based on the findings of both the survey and focus groups, there is a statistically significant difference between how Black students report their experiences with racial microaggressions in comparison to their other-raced peers. The indicators for racial microaggression include “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble” “I have had teachers who encourage respectful conversations about race and racism” and “most of my teachers have been my same race.”

The average survey response of Black students revealed they disagreed with the statement “most of my teachers have been my same race.” In the high school focus groups students shared they have mostly had white teachers since elementary school. These findings are supported in the research on the lack of teacher diversity (Sleeter, 2001), where across the nation the teaching force is more than 70% white. Additionally, as it relates to the indicator statement “I have had teachers who encourage respectful conversations about race and racism” students in both the survey and focus group shared mixed experiences. Some

students agreed with the statement others shared experiences of teacher not correcting offensive behavior. Christine Sleeter (2016) asserts, “the literature continues to report white resistance to and fatigue from talking about and working on race” (p. 2). And further, in teacher preparation programs “when faculty members (particularly faculty of color) challenge white students to grapple with racial issues, students often express their anger in course evaluations, which are then used to undermine and discredit the faculty members” (Sleeter, p. 5). Thus the reports of Black students who say they have not had teachers who encourage conversations about race is supported by challenges faced in teacher preparation programs to move teachers out of their comfort zones so they can face their own biases and deconstruct the narratives of deficit typically associated with students of color (Bryan, 2017; Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Lastly, as it relates to the indicator statement “I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble,” in the survey Black students reveal their experience with getting in trouble in class is different than their other-raced peers. This finding is supported in the research on classroom discipline and harsh school discipline practices that disproportionately disadvantage Black students. According to this research harsh and disproportionate disciplinary practices are often the result of a cultural mismatch between Black students and their mostly white teachers, because their teachers view their pretentiousness and body language as a threat (Milner & Tenore, 2010). For example; in the focus group interview with high school students, one student shared that he gets in more trouble than his peers because “I have questions about why we are doing this work and I keep asking.” From my own experience, this type of questioning from students does not result in disciplinary action and is often encouraged as an age-appropriate display of agency when the student

questioning the teacher is white. A lack of teachers' cultural awareness leads to an overuse of punitive disciplinary practices by teachers and school administrators and a differential classroom learning experience for Black students (Milner & Tenore, 2010).

How do Black students' experience learning in their classrooms in comparison to their other-raced peers?

Based on the findings of the focus groups Black students are experiencing lowered academic expectations in comparison to their Asian and white peers as evidenced by the amount of work they are assigned and the level of rigor of the assignments. Lowered academic expectations are juxtaposed with behavior expectations that are not age or culturally appropriate. In the focus groups students shared examples of being expected to remain quiet, learn independently, and from a computer. For students in both middle school and high school focus groups the expectation that students remain silent even after completing their assignment resulted in them getting in trouble (reprimanded or separated from the group) for "talking to peers or clowning around." These contrary expectations, low academic expectation and a hyper focus on behavior management are typically associated with schooling and not with providing students an educational experience (Milner & Tenore, 2010). For clarification, when students are being schooled there is a hyper-focus on controlling students' bodies, not on planning for a rich educational experience that will push students critically think and own their learning. I posit that for Black students these cumulative experiences are perhaps preventing them from achieving at the same level as their other-raced peers, in particular their Asian and white peers, because they are not receiving the same level of instruction.

Further, for two of the indicator statements “it doesn’t matter to me whether my teacher is my same race” and “most of my teachers have been my same race,” associated with the racial microaggression subcategory micro invalidation Black students disagreed with these statements. This suggests that it does matter to Black students whether their teacher in their same race while at the same time revealing that most of their teachers have not been their same race. The experience of matriculating through school rarely being taught by a teacher who shares the same cultural background of their students is an example of a micro invalidation. Micro invalidation refers to the “verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color” (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 555). The rarity or absence of Black teachers in education who are able to empathize with and guide their students through their learning experience is an example of a micro invalidation because this absence suggests a silencing or disregard for the importance to Black students of being taught by educators who are culturally similar or at least aware of differences in order to eliminate lowered academic expectation and the disproportionate and disciplinary practices prevalent in urban public schools across America. Students in the high school focus group shared examples of a lack of academic rigor, not being challenged, and the expectation that they are silent in class. For Black students, their classrooms perhaps more often than not, are spaces where their teachers lower expectations and rigor in an effort to avoid the push back that most students display when they are being challenged to think critically, problem solve, and demonstrate ownership and understanding of their learning (Milner & Tenore, 2010). However, this developmentally appropriate pushback is deemed intolerable when exhibited by Black students resulting in an overuse of harsh disciplinary practices. Thus, as suggested by the existing research classroom

learning experiences for Black students are experiences with schooling rather than education (Milner & Tenore, 2010).

To what extent do Black students connect their classroom learning experiences to their academic performance?

Although Black students who participated in the focus groups did explicitly connect their classroom learning experiences to their academic performance, the examples they shared are indicators of teachers' low expectations. For example, "in the suburbs, my cousin always has homework or a project" in comparison to the high school students in this focus group rarely having homework. Students in the high school focus group shared there always seems to be a focus on grades but not on whether they understand the material or whether they are learning. The discussion also revealed that for at least one student, there was curriculum-coverage orientation that left the student with an impression that "grades are more important than understanding" and mastery. This is an example of students' learning experiences being invalidated due to a focus on assignment completion versus actual learning and understanding. In the literature these are all subtle examples of how race, racism, and bias also referred to as racial microaggressions are likely to negatively impact the classroom learning experiences of Black students.

These findings are also supported in the research on teacher expectations. In classrooms, low teacher expectations refer to a teacher's belief that the student or students in front of them will likely not succeed (Allen, 2012; Baker, 1999; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). The research on teacher's and their lowered expectations for particular groups of students suggest that some teachers decide there is no need to expend energy educating students who are not going to be succeed in the future, possibly creating a self-fulfilling

prophesy. Effective pedagogical practices such as group work and Socratic Seminar are how teachers engage students in learning are examples of good teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner & Tenore 2010) that are denied to Blacks students when their teachers' tool bag is limited to schooling practices rather than educational practices. These types of schooling practices are further demonstrative of a lack of cultural competency and pedagogy that teachers must have to ensure effective instructional practices that provide varied opportunities for students to access and engage in learning. In summary, as revealed by the survey and focus group findings, Black students are experiencing classroom learning differently and these differences are perhaps negatively impacting their learning outcomes in comparison to their other-raced peers, thus contributing to the maintenance of the academic achievement gap.

To what extent are the experiences of Blacks students correlated with indicators for racial battle fatigue?

Students in this study did not name race or racism as impacting their classroom learning experiences. However, one student from the high school focus group helped to shed light on why students did not make any raced-based comparison:

There aren't any white students in my class. There are only Black and Hispanic students in my classes.

This is to say that despite a court decree that "separate is inherently unequal" and despite the 1954 ruling that schools must integrate, a ruling that is more than two generation old, these Black students, like Black students across the nation, attend schools that are majority Black and Hispanic, with few Asian or white peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and are taught by a mostly white teacher force. This perhaps explains why Black students are unable to compare

whether they are being treated differently because as students noted they are rarely in classes with Asian or white students.

These findings, along with the existing research suggest that exposure to racial microaggressions and racial battle fatigue are more likely to be experienced by Black students as they matriculate from kindergarten through high school because they are predominately taught by teachers who lack culturally responsive classroom management practices (Bryan 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Continuous exposure to lowered academic expectations and a hyper-focus on behaviors that exceed development or cultural expectations, leads to racial battle fatigue because unfair disciplinary action often results in loss of instructional time, subsequently creating stress for students, which perpetuate classroom disruptions (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Cumulative experiences with racial microaggressions such as the micro assaults that result from harsh and disproportionate disciplinary practices, the micro insults related to not having teachers who are comfortable facilitating respectful conversations about race or racism, and the micro invalidation of not having teachers who share a cultural awareness or similar background as their students results in distinctively different educational experience for Black students in comparison to their other-raced peers. I assert, the data from this study suggest that there is a high likelihood that differential classroom learning experiences resulting in racial battle fatigue are taking a psychological toll on the minds of Blacks students because of continuous exposure to racial microaggressions (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). It appears Black students are possibly expending a significant amount of mental and emotional energy in order to battle the racial micro invalidation of rarely being taught by a teacher who understands them culturally and the micro assault of being punitively disciplined for age and culturally appropriate behaviors

that perhaps a majority white teaching force has not been equipped to understand. This diversion of Black students' energy away from learning is perhaps the reason the academic achievement gap has been so persistent and resistant to decades of reform. In this section I discussed the affirmative answers to each of the research questions. In the next section, I will revisit and discuss the theoretical frames which underpin this research in order to shed light on the far-reaching impacts of institutionalized racism manifesting as implicit biases that impact Black students' learning outcomes and extend beyond the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers.

In summary, the majority of the teaching force is white, middle class, and female (Bryan, 2017; Milner & Tenore, 2010) and the majority of the students attending school in large urban school districts are students of color (Bryan, 2017; Milner & Tenore, 2010). And since it has been proven (Milner & Tenore, 2010; Nance, 2016) that (a) Black students are disproportionately disciplined for subjective school infractions, (b) overrepresented in special education, and (c) by and large taught by white female teachers, it must also be explicitly stated that Black students are indeed experiencing classroom learning differently than their other-raced peers and in ways that the research asserts negatively impacts their learning experiences and outcomes (Bryan, 2017; Fine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Nance, 2016; C. Phillips, 2017).

Implications

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this study have shed light on a long-existing problem in education: that not enough attention is being paid to the far-reaching and negative impacts that the history of racism in this country is having on the

educational experiences of Black students. As Sleeter (2016) and Bryan (2017) note, there is a concerted effort to avoid conversations about race and racism in teacher preparation programs. In school-based discussions about curriculum and pedagogy, as Ladson-Billings (2006) and Milner and Tenore (2010) assert, not talking about the impacts of race and racism in education directly impacts student learning outcomes because teachers are ill-prepared to face their own biases in order to disrupt the deficit narratives associated with Black students. And, as both Tuck (2009) and Howard and Navarro (2016) posit, the influence of popularized research without attention to the voices and lived experiences of Black students, Black educators, and Black researchers is a major reason education policy has not been effective in addressing the persistent and resistant academic achievement gap.

Teacher education programs

In teacher education programs this silence around race and racism may be hindering an honest look at the lack of teacher diversity in public schools which stems from the lack of diversity in teacher preparation programs, which, as (Bryan, 2017) posits, directly feeds the school-to-prison pipeline due to the cultural mismatch that results from harsh disciplinary practices exercised in classrooms across America by ill-prepared teachers at the expense of the education and future life success of their Black students. It is important to note, there is often an presumption that there simply are not as many people of color who are interested in teaching, and that is why the number of Black teachers in education is so low. And this may be true in part, but not for the reasons typically purported, such as a lack of interest amongst Black college students to join the field of education (Bryan, 2017). As Nathaniel Bryan demonstrates in his 2017 examination of teacher preparation programs a more accurate explanation exists to better understanding why 80% of the teaching force is white and why

Black students are rarely taught by teachers that share their same cultural background. He writes:

Teachers are role models for all children (p. 329). Most preservice teacher programs have not made intentional efforts to attract a more diverse preservice teacher education population. Neither are public K–12 schools making any special effort to recruit, hire and retain a more diverse teaching population ... therefore less than 10% of teachers are of color” p. 329). Based on the current teacher demographic, children, especially females, are more likely to become teachers who will one day teach Black boys and other students of color [because of representations of educators who look like them]. (p. 330)

As Bryan (2017) further asserts, teacher preparation programs are not attracting a diverse preservice teaching force, not because Black undergraduates are not interested in teaching but more so because Black undergraduates and K–12 students rarely have a teacher who is their same race that they can look up to and aspire towards becoming educators as well. It is also important to note, students of color will, in the near future, be a majority across public education and are already the majority in most urban public districts which suggests that an honest look at the lack of teacher diversity in public schools is immediately necessary in order to mitigate and eliminate the disparities that currently exist for students of color in general, and Black students in particular.

Curriculum and pedagogy

The lack of diversity in teacher preparation programs is important to analyze for unintended impact because curriculum and pedagogy are delivered by teachers. Teachers who are culturally different than their students and ill-prepared to face their biases are also

ill-prepared to question, revise and supplement curriculum to meet the needs and interests of their students. These needs include learning about the contributions of people of color currently absent from curriculum. It is perhaps irresponsible that teacher preparation programs are graduating novice teachers into schools where the majority of students are Black and Hispanic however the curriculum does not affirm their identities or the contributions of the multitudes of Mathematicians, Historians, Writers and Scientist that share similar ethnic backgrounds as the students (Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). What is needed in teacher preparation programs are opportunities and experiences with multicultural curriculum and the identities and biases teachers bring into the profession in order to change the beliefs of novice teachers before they enter the field of education. However, as Sleeter's (2001) review of teacher education programs reveals, "several case studies have examined predominately white teacher education programs that do "business as usual"... "the programs themselves provide disjointed multicultural content, dependent on the interests of individual professors" (p. 95). This is not surprising, as in "2007 teacher education faculty were about 78% white" (Sleeter, 2016, p.4). Teacher preparation educators are mostly white, preservice teachers are mostly white, and the urban school districts that these majority white teachers end up in are mostly Black and Hispanic. Thus, novice teachers who go into "urban schools were completely unprepared for the students and setting and had great difficulty" (p. 95).

Sleeter (2001) further asserts, "preservice teachers tend to use colorblindness as a way of coping with fear and ignorance" (p. 95). But instead of being colorblind, novice teachers must be guided through preservice learning experiences that help them see "how discrimination functions in society" so that they can become "color conscious" (Ullucci &

Battery, 2011). This call to rethink and revise curriculum is not new. Throughout the early 1970s and 1980s, Howard and Navarro (2016) write, “scholars such as James Banks (1972), Christine Sleeter and Care Grant (1987), Genva Gay (1988) and Carlos Cortes (1991) explained the educational inequities [that exist] through cultural, historical, and inclusion lens that [do] not recognize the importance of non-white groups in school curriculum” (p. 4), and this exclusion continues to exist today, which may also explain why Black students do not have the language to connect their classroom learning experiences to their race, to racism, or to implicit bias; they simply aren’t being taught their history.

Education policy

Educators, researchers, and education policy makers can no longer ignore the detrimental consequences that not centralizing race, racism, and implicit bias is having on large numbers of Black students. Studying the persistence of the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers shed a critical light on the root of the problem, and that is teacher preparation and professional development for educators in preparation for teaching students who have historically been marginalized. This training has become critical when children as young as two years old are being pushed out of school and into the prison pipeline because their teachers are not equipped to unpack their own biases in order to teach them (Bryan, 2017).

In education, the probability that racism and implicit bias exists in K–12 classrooms across the US has only recently begun to be acknowledged. However, most of this work *only* exists in critical race literature. The more popular and prominently positioned literature on Black students’ academic achievement does not centralize race and racism but has somehow been allowed to be the primary influencers of education policy and the resulting ineffective

education reforms for decades (Harris & Herrington, 2006). This tendency is yet another example of the silencing, invalidation, and paternalizing of the experiences of Black people as subjects to be studied by others but incapable of telling their own story (Tuck, 2009). These popularized works conducted by outsiders appear to misidentify symptoms of historical racism, such as the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers, as causes unrelated to institutionalized racism. It is my assertion that what is missing from the discourse is centralizing the role of racism and implicit bias as critical factors to be understood in order to address the opportunity and achievement gaps at their roots.

Outside of critical race work, there appears to be an acceptance of glaring discrepancies in K–12 education that disadvantage Black students. These discrepancies include a majority white teaching staff in urban public schools despite a growing student population of students of color (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Also, teacher preparation programs historically attract and graduate large numbers of white teachers who are not explicitly being prepared to teach students who are racially and culturally different from them (Sleeter, 2016). A third discrepancy is the subjective, discriminatory, and harsh discipline practices and policies that disproportionately penalize Black students, not because they pose an actual threat, but rather because they are viewed as threatening (Howard & Navarro, 2016) by their ill-prepared teachers.

Education policies such as codes of conduct need to be revisited and revised to determine the undue harm that is embedded in these policies. Currently, there is much research and documentation related to the disproportionate rates at which Black students are suspended (Losen, Keith, Hodson, & Martinez, 2016; Nance, 2016). However, missing from

the data is *why* Black students are disproportionately suspended, and according to the findings of this study, it appears the answer lies in the different ways Black students are perceived and thus interacted with in their classrooms. Classroom teachers who are ill-prepared to redirect off-task or disruptive behaviors may escalate student behaviors rather than diffuse and redirect the behaviors, thus maintaining a productive classroom learning environment. Whereas teachers hold the power in a classroom, the course of action which teachers take may be overused and misused (e.g., sending students out of class and making discipline referrals) in an attempt to regain control when what their students may really need is space, time to reflect, and/or kind but firm reminders of the expectations. Currently, education policies such as codes of conduct, which are written in accordance with the United States Constitution, state that students will not be suspended, excluded, or otherwise disciplined on account of race, color, national origin, or ethnicity (Boston Public Schools, 2016). However, when the teachers placed in front of students have not received the necessary training to explicitly address and disrupt the implicit racial biases they carry around subconsciously, the promises in these code of conduct policies cannot be guaranteed.

The implications of this work provide a new lens from which to view the behaviors of Black students. Whereas these behaviors have typically been perceived as students trying to avoid doing their work and being unmotivated, it may in fact be possible that students' behaviors are more aligned with strategies that students use to protect themselves from harm, including head down, hood on, being off-task, and skipping class. These behaviors often result in students being reprimanded, sent out of class, written up, or suspended from school. The impact of implicit biases on the academic success of Black students suggests the critical necessity of key staff persons required to engage in training that prepares students to notice

the signs and symptoms associated with constantly battling against racial microaggressions. As the findings of this study suggest, these symptoms manifest as racial battle fatigue and have specific indicators that are related to those associated with stress and anxiety, including stomach aches, headaches, depression, and disengaging from interactions with adults and peers. Student support persons such as principals, deans, guidance counselors, and the school nurse must therefore receive implicit bias training and training specific to being aware of and screening for symptoms of racial battle fatigue so they are in a position to advocate on behalf of Black students in more critical if not lifesaving ways that disrupt the perceptions that Black students who ask to go to the nurse or the bathroom are disengaged, disruptive, and/or do not value their education.

As the literature has shown, there is a lack of cultural awareness and understanding on the part of classroom teachers. This lack is and has been having longlasting and detrimental consequences for Black students that are well documented (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Jones, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, it is not just the responsibility of classroom teachers to protect the mental health and well-being of students when they are in school; this is also the responsibility of principals, deans, guidance counselors, and school nurses. As Bryan (2017) points out, “when students of color attend predominately white schools, they are often misjudged and misunderstood and become victims of racial microaggressions because they often do not fit with mainstream white middle class schooling expectations” (p. 328). Black students, whether they attend predominately white schools or schools that are majority Black and Hispanic, are disproportionately disciplined and are thus disproportionately losing out on instructional time, which I posit results in learning gaps and leads to attention and behavior challenges, which perpetuates the disproportionate rate at

which Black students are disciplined. The result is that instead of Black students being funneled towards a career in education similar to their white peers, where they can provide culturally competent teaching in service of student achievement, Black students are being funneled into the criminal justice system (Bryan, 2017).

The far-reaching implications

The theoretical frameworks that underpin this research are critical race theory (CRT), expectation theory, racial microaggressions, and racial battle fatigue. CRT highlights the importance of centralizing race and racism when discussing how Black students are experiencing classroom-based teaching and learning. In other words, CRT offers race-centered perspectives that inform how it is possible that students of different races could have different classroom learning experiences. One part of the explanation could be found in the fact that the majority of students attending urban public schools are Black and Hispanic while their teachers are predominately white. However, this only explains part of the challenge. Another part of the challenge lies in the fact that in both teacher preparation programs and in-service training for classroom teachers, race and racism are still not regularly discussed. This is to say, there appear to be few if any opportunities for educators and those pursuing careers in education to learn about the far-reaching impacts of racism on their own psyches and subsequent interactions with their students, especially their Black students. Without an opportunity for educators to address their biases and how their biases manifest in the classroom, teachers' interactions with their Black students are likely to further marginalize and oppress them. The results of this study aligned with existing research that found that teachers who have not had opportunities to study themselves and their students do not understand the cultural differences that are critical in order to be effective. This leads to

education practices that are less about educating students and more about controlling students' behaviors (Milner & Tenore, 2010), which for many Black students supersedes providing rich, meaningful, and rigorous course work for them to engage with (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Expectation theory (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Sibley, & Rosenthal, 2015; van den Bergh, Denessen, Hornstra, & Voeten, 2010) helps to explain how it is possible that teachers (regardless of their race but who are mostly white) in public schools across the United States could enter into education with an admirable desire to provide top-notch educational experiences for the students they serve but then become primarily responsible for the overrepresentation of Black students in special education, the underrepresentation of Black students in advanced courses, and the disproportionate rates of disciplinary referrals and out-of-school suspensions. To understand how these opposing desires are possible, expectation theory was used to shed light on how implicit biases reinforced since childhood, predominately through the media (Avery & Peffley, 2003), often subconsciously influence how teachers think of their Black students. Implicit biases are subtle but detrimental, so much so that even when there is a racially mixed classroom, Black students typically underperform. And as existing research has shown (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010) and this study sought to further explore, in classrooms across the United States, Black students are underperforming because their teachers subconsciously expect less from them, not because Black students are incapable of academic achievement.

The subcategories of racial microaggression, that is, micro insult, micro assault, and micro invalidation, provided a lens through which to examine the different ways a student might experience classroom learning differently and, more alarmingly, how these subtle

differences suggest that students are disengaging from school (mentally, emotionally, or physically) as a form of self-protection. The need for self-protection was further clarified through a review of the literature on racial battle fatigue, which describes the cumulative stress related to constantly battling against racial microaggressions. Focus group discussion shed a more nuanced light on the subtle nature of racial microaggressions and how challenging it is for students to name race and racism as factors that negatively contribute to their classroom learning experiences and learning outcomes. According to the research, it is also challenging for adults to confidently name the subtle nature of their experiences with racial microaggressions and the negative impacts on their daily live (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2011). Nonetheless, the stress that is associated with constantly battling against racial microaggressions is similar to the battle fatigue that soldiers experience in combat (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). For Black students, the physiological symptoms associated with this type of stress include headaches and stomach aches, the psychosocial symptoms includes withdrawing from social interactions with peers and or adults, and the psychological symptoms include anger and depression (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

The physiological, psychosocial, and psychological symptoms associated with racial battle fatigue further supports the critical importance of centralizing race and racism when discussing how to improve the classroom learning experiences and academic outcomes of Black students in K–12 public schools. However, as existing school-to-prison pipeline research has shown (Nance, 2016), the self-protective measures that students exercise, such as disengaging from school, are putting students at great risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system, incarceration (Losen, Keith, Hodson, & Martinez, 2016), or worse: premature death. Thus, the disservice and differential treatment that Black students experience in

classrooms has a far-reaching impact that goes beyond persistent and resistant achievement gap. Unchecked implicit biases in K–12 classrooms are setting Black students up for disproportionate rates of failure in life instead of success and at a significantly more extreme and detrimental rate than that of their Asian and white peers.

In summary, this study sought to shed light on the impacts of institutionalized racism and how racism is being experienced by Black students in comparison to their other-raced peers. The study used racial microaggressions as the lens in order to make the argument for centralizing racism and implicit bias in all reform-related discourse aimed at resolving the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers. Although this study's sample size is too small to make broader generalizations of public schools across the United States, the results of the online survey and focus groups shed light on a gap in teacher preparation programs, both preservice and in-service, and for other school personnel who could be better positioned to advocate on behalf of students in a way that supports teachers but not further marginalize and harm Black students. The implications for this work are far reaching because the history of racism in the United States is far reaching. Many of the injustices that Black students are experiencing in classrooms due to implicit biases are being repeated in society, as exemplified by the unjust and disproportionately harsh interactions Black people have always had with law enforcement and the courts. There appears to be an association with the implicit biased interactions that Black students are experiencing in the classroom, which may be directly leading to school disengagement and into the school-to-prison pipeline, or worse. For this reason, centralizing race, racism, and the far-reaching impact of implicit biases on the classroom learning experiences of Black students is of critical

necessity in order to address the detrimental learning outcomes and life success of our most marginalized people of color: Black people.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include a small sample size and uneven representation of participants, racially and across the 6–12 grade band. The experiences of 95 students cannot be generalized as representative of the classroom learning experiences of young people attending public school across the United States. However, the findings of this study do suggest, if not uncover, an unanticipated factor contributing to students' lack of awareness of the correlation between their race, racism, and their classroom learning experiences: Schools have been resegregated, and a mostly white and culturally unaware teaching force is ill-prepared to effectively teach their Black students.

This leads to another limitation of this study, which was comparing the classroom learning experiences of Black students to their other-raced peers. As noted by the Black students who participated in the focus group, they are unable to make comparisons because there are typically only other Black and Hispanic students in their classroom. Very rarely are there students in their classrooms who are white. The one student who shared her cousin's experience attending school in the suburbs as "racist" does shed light on the limitation of this study taking place near a large urban district where the student population tends to be majority Black and Hispanic with a small percentage of Asian students. Lastly, although this study sought to mirror the racial demographics of a large urban school district, there might be more to learn from students of all racial backgrounds if the participant numbers for each racial group were more even.

Recommendations

Students of all racial and ethnic groups are attending schools that have been resegregated after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling in 1954, and this is significant. Research needs to be conducted to further study the impact on all students to include not only their race but also their socioeconomic status to better understand the unique classroom learning experiences of each group of students. Urban public schools are recipients of Title One federal funds, which is indicative of high percentages of students whose families are living at or below the poverty line. Including the socioeconomic mismatch of a teaching force that is mostly white and female will provide yet another lens that supports policy changes in teacher education programs to require explicit training on racial and socioeconomic biases in addition to required training on becoming more culturally competent. This research is especially necessary in light of the fact that the student of color population is increasing at the same time teacher preparation programs continue to produce large numbers of teachers who are white, female, and middle class.

Because schools are places where learning happens, learning about the history of this country, including its history of race and racism, must be a part of the learning experience for both students and educators. In school, history lessons and discussions about race, racism, and implicit bias must happen at each grade level so that students of all races are aware of, knowledgeable about, and prepared to explicitly talk about their experiences and the impact of race, racism, and implicit biases on their learning experiences. Teacher preparation programs as well as school-based professional development must provide multi-semester course offerings on race, racism, and implicit bias to include cultural competency in service of improving teaching pedagogy and practice. Training on implicit biases, indicators of racial

microaggression, and symptoms of racial battle fatigue must also be extended to include school personnel who are better positioned to support teachers and advocate for students by being knowledgeable about the effects of cultural mismatches in classrooms. This must be the promise and mission of every teacher preparation program and the professional development requirements of public school districts across the nation.

Lastly, a study similar to this one needs to be conducted on a larger scale to collect additional quantifiable data on the classroom learning experiences of Black students as compared to their other-raced peers across various types of schools and districts across the United States. The collective and individual stories of Black students should also be incorporated so that we can continue to learn more about how Black students are experiencing classroom learning in spaces where the student population is more diverse or predominately white.

In order to address the persistence of the academic achievement gap between Black student and their other-raced peers and the detrimental consequences of being misunderstood, racism and implicit bias can no longer be siloed within critical race studies and must instead be centralized across all education research, policy, and programs.

Final Remarks

It appears that somewhere between the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling and electing the first Black president of the United States, it was presumed that the issues of race and racism had been resolved. But we do not yet live in a post-racist America. We live in a country where the influence and impact of race and racism, especially in education are simply not talked about. Derald Wing Sue's work (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008)

brought microaggressions and implicit biases back to the fore for a brief moment before the macro aggressions of the senseless murders of Black men and boys at the hands of white police officers and white vigilantes were the resounding foci. And we are presently living in a time where the 45th president of the United States promotes and projects bigotry. However, these egregious events are distracting the conversation from the less egregious, subtler forms of racism and implicit bias that are often unintentional but no less detrimental. For Black students, the impact on their mental health from the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions leads to racial battle fatigue which distracts students from attending to their educational experiences and instead forces them to choose between leaving school or subjecting themselves to low expectations, harsh disciplinary practices, and classroom interactions that chip away at their identity.

In schools across the United States, urban districts have a majority of Black and Hispanic students; however, the teaching force is largely white and female. Teacher education programs must revise courses to ensure preservice teachers are guided in a deep reflection of their identity and the role that racism and implicit bias will play in the classroom learning experiences of the students they will teach. Becoming genuinely aware of cultural differences, implicit biases, and culturally appropriate teaching pedagogy must be the mission of every teacher preparation program in order to close the academic achievement gap between Black students and their other-raced peers.

APPENDIX A. PEER REVIEW OF SURVEY INSTRUMENT
FOR CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

February 13, 2018

Purpose

Measure the classroom learning experiences of a diverse group of students in order to determine if Black students report significantly higher rates of negative classroom learning experiences as compared to their other raced peers.

Target grade band

Students in middle and high school (ages: 12-17yrs).

Please help me

Examine the construct validity of the questions

Do the questions measure what I say I want to measure?



Theories

Racial micro aggressions: Black people (students) experiences racial micro aggressions at higher rates than other races.

Racial battle fatigue: The cumulative impact of battling racial micro aggressions leads to physical, psychological and social fatigue due to the expenditure of energy to protect ones self from mental and emotional harm.

Self-Efficacy: Constantly battling racial micro aggressions and feeling physically, psychologically and socially fatigued whittles away at ones self-efficacy to the extent that students do not feel confident in their ability to put in the necessary time and effort to excel academically.

My Research Questions:

Do Black students experience racial micro aggressions in the classroom at a higher rate than their other raced peers?

Do Black students' reported responses indicate lower levels of self efficacy in comparison to their other raced peers?

Do Black students' reported experiences correlate with the symptoms of racial battle fatigue at significantly higher rates than their other raced peers?

Are the classroom learning experiences of Black students negatively correlated with their academic achievement? ie higher rates of reported experiences with racial micro aggression lower academic achievement.

APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT LETTER

Participants Needed for Two-Phase Research Study

Hello,

I invite anyone in grades 6 through the 12th grade to take part in an online survey. This survey is open to students of all ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of this survey is to collect information about students' classroom learning experiences with racial microaggressions. In this survey you will be asked to report on a range of classroom experiences you may or may not have had.

Completing the survey will take approximately 30 minutes.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time or you may choose to answer specific question questions and skip others.

Participation is confidential.

However, you will receive a link to the survey using your BPS email address. Your email address will not be connected to your survey responses.

This study has been approved by the UMass Boston Institutional Review Board

To participate in this study you will need parent permission. Please return the signed parent/guardian consent form by March 2, 2018. See attached consent form.

For more information please contact:

Ms. Nadine O'Garro, Principal Investigator
Dr. Patricia Krueger-Henney, Supervising Professor

APPENDIX C. LETTER OF CONSENT

University of Massachusetts Boston
Graduate College of Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

Consent Form For

The a/effects of implicit bias on the academic success of Black students attending an urban public school in the Northeastern region of the United States

Introduction and Contact Information

You are asked to take part in a research project that seeks to better understand students' classroom learning experiences and whether learning experiences are significantly different across racial backgrounds. My name is Nadine O'Garro. I am a doctoral student in the Leadership in Urban Schools doctoral program. As partial fulfillment of my degree, I will be conducting research at one urban high school in Boston, Massachusetts. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later I, will discuss them with you. My telephone number is 617-785-0772.

Description of the Project:

This research seeks to better understand the influence of institutionalized racism and implicit bias on the learning experiences of African American students attending public school in and around Boston, Massachusetts. Participation in this study will take approximately 20 minutes. If you decide to participant in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. You may also be invited to take part in a focus group with 3-4 other participants. The focus group interview will take approximate 90 minutes.

If you are a student and you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete one online survey (approximately 20 minutes). If you are selected and choose to participate in the focus group interview a light dinner and refreshments will be served. The focus group interview will be audio-taped and will last approximately 90 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts:

The primary risk associated with this study is minimal. The emergence of negative or distressful feelings in completing the research materials is no greater than the risk ordinarily encountered in daily life or in the performance of similar activities or routine examinations. You may speak with me to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

Benefits:

This study strives to understand the learning experiences of Black high school students attending public school in an urban school district. The potential benefit of your participation is to help district leaders understand how institutionalized racism and implicit bias impact the educational experiences of Black students. Potentially this research can be used to improve necessary programs related to teacher professional development and school climate. Your participation will remain confidential. Research of this type is important because to date, there are no studies that examine the influence of institutionalized racism on the classroom learning experiences of Black high school students. This study has the potential catalyze additional research into issues related to this influence of racism and implicit bias on student learning experiences.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Your school will be known as Urban High in Massachusetts. To the best of my ability I will also omit or alter any detail that might identify a specific person or unique school characteristic. All research materials and data that I collect will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home that only I have access to. Three years after the end of my study and the approval of my dissertation, all research materials, including field notes, audio tapes, transcriptions, emails and memos will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is **voluntary**. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should let me know directly in person or phone. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your grade or status as a student.

Rights:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach me or my research supervisors, Dr. Tricia Kress or Dr. Patricia Krueger-Henney, at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building 2-080, University of Massachusetts, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at (617) 287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

(Age certification is typically used in situations in which adolescents may unintentionally be recruited. It is not necessary to verify age when the investigator is certain that all participants will be adults)

Signature of Participant Date Signature of Researcher

Printed Name of Participant Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

UMASS BOSTON INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO AUDIO- OR VIDEOTAPING & TRANSCRIPTION

The a/effects of implicit bias on the academic success of Black students attending an urban public school in the Northeastern region of the United States

This study involves the audio taping (videotaping) of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audiotape (videotape) or the transcript. Only the researcher team will be able to listen (view) the tapes.

The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Immediately following the interview, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

By signing this form you are consenting to:

- ☐ having your interview taped;
- ☐ having the tape transcribed;
- ☐ use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.

This consent for taping is effective until the following date: **January 15th, 2021**. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D. ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

University of Massachusetts Boston
Graduate College of Education
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

The a/effects of implicit bias on the academic success of Black students attending an urban public school in the Northeastern region of the United States

Introduction and Contact Information

You are asked to take part in a research project that seeks to better understand students' classroom learning experiences and whether learning experiences are significantly different across racial backgrounds. My name is Nadine O'Garro. I am a doctoral student in the Urban Education, Leadership and Policy doctoral program. As partial fulfillment of my degree, I will be conducting research on the classroom learning experiences of students attending public school in the Northeastern Region of the United States. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later I, will discuss them with you. My telephone number is 617-785-0772.

Description of the Project:

This research seeks to better understand the influence of institutionalized racism and implicit bias on the learning experiences of students attending public school in and around Boston, Massachusetts. This study has two phases.

If you are a student and decide to participant in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey (approximately 30 minutes). You may also be invited to take part in a focus group with 3-4 other participants. The focus group interview will take approximate 90 minutes. The focus group interview will be audiotaped; a light dinner and refreshments will be served

Risks or Discomforts:

The primary risk associated with this study is minimal. The emergence of negative or distress completing the questionnaire is no greater than the risk ordinarily encountered in daily life or in the performance of similar activities or routine examinations. You may speak with me to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

Benefits:

This study strives to understand the classroom learning experiences of students attending public school. The potential benefit of your participation is to help district leaders understand

how institutionalized racism and implicit bias impact students' educational experiences. This research will be used to improve programs related to education policy and teacher professional development. Your participation will remain confidential. Research of this type is important because to date, there are no studies that examine the influence of institutionalized racism on the classroom learning experiences of students. This study has the potential catalyze additional research into issues related to other factors that influence students' classroom learning experiences.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Your part in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. To the best of my ability I will omit or alter any detail that might identify a specific person or unique school characteristic. All research materials and data that I collect will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home that only I have access to. Three years after the end of my study and the approval of my dissertation, all research materials, including field notes, audiotapes, transcriptions, emails and memos will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation:

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is **voluntary**. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should let me know directly in person or phone. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your grade or status as a student.

Rights:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach me or my research supervisors, Dr. Tricia Kress or Dr. Patricia Krueger-Henney, at any time. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building 2-080, University of Massachusetts, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at (617) 287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

(Age certification is typically used in situations in which adolescents may unintentionally be recruited. It is not necessary to verify age when the investigator is certain that all participants will be adults)

Signature of Participant Date

Signature of Researcher

Printed Name of Participant
Researcher

Typed/Printed Name of

APPENDIX E. ONLINE SURVEY

The a/effect of implicit bias on the classroom learning experiences of students attending secondary public schools

Introduction

My name is Nadine O'Garro and I am a doctoral candidate in the Urban Education, Leadership and Policy Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. This questionnaire is designed to help me gain a better of understanding of how implicit bias impacts your classroom learning experiences and academic achievement. The questionnaire should take roughly 15-20 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your time and support with my doctoral dissertation.

Part 1: Classroom learning experiences

These questions ask about your classroom learning experiences over the years related to feeling ignored, insulted or avoided by your teachers.

Please indicate your response about each statement by using the following scale:

(4) Strongly Agree, (3) Agree, (2) Disagree, (1) Strongly Disagree

Classroom Learning Experiences	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Student Experience				
1. I take class less seriously if the teachers does not look like me.	4	3	2	1
2. It doesn't matter to me whether my teacher is my same race.	4	3	2	1
3. I can get help for any class when I need it.	4	3	2	1
Racial Microaggression				
4. I have never worried about being mistreated by my teachers.	4	3	2	1
5. I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble.	4	3	2	1
6. I have had teachers who encourage respectful conversations about race and racism.	4	3	2	1
7. Most of my teachers believe I will be successful.	4	3	2	1
8. Most of my teachers have been my same race.	4	3	2	1
9. Most of the books I have read in school have been about main characters that are my same race?	4	3	2	1
Racial Battle Fatigue				
10. I feel energized and engaged in most of my classes.	4	3	2	1
12. I get headaches in certain classes.	4	3	2	1
13. I get stomach aches in certain classes.	4	3	2	1
14. In some classes I worry I will not get good grades because my teacher does not like me.	4	3	2	1
15. I have gotten in trouble for doing the same things students of a different race were doing, but they did not get in trouble.	4	3	2	1
Self-Efficacy				
16. Getting good grades in school is within my control.	4	3	2	1
17. Being successful in life is within my control.	4	3	2	1
18. I believe getting a good job after high school/ college is within my control.	4	3	2	1
19. Earning enough money to take care myself after high school/ college is within my control.	4	3	2	1

APPENDIX F. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Middle School Focus group

Introductory Remarks (10 minutes)

Welcome. My name is Ms. Nadine and I am a Doctoral student at UMass Boston. Thank you for coming here today to talk with me. [*Flip Chart: Welcome and Thank you*].

You may have noticed there are snacks —please feel free to take some now, or anytime later.

The purpose of this work I am doing is because not enough is known about the classroom experiences of Black students from their perspective. Many of the existing studies are about teacher experiences or the experiences of Black students in college.

To learn more about the classroom learning experiences of Black students I want to hear directly from you.

[*Flip chart*]

Opt Out

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you may end your participation at any time without consequence. If you wish to terminate participation, you should let me know directly in person or phone. Whatever you decide will in no way affect your grade or status as a student.

Norms

Try not to talk at the same time as someone else, make sure everyone gets a chance to speak

There are no right or wrong answers

No side conversations

No use of cell phones

Be respectful

Confidentiality: what ever is said in this space must remain in this space.

Confidentiality

Your participation will be completely confidential. The information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in any way that would allow anyone to identify you or your school. I will omit or alter any detail that might identify a specific person or unique school name or characteristic. All research materials and data that I collect will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home that only I have access to. Three years after my study has

been approved all research materials, including notes; audiotapes, transcriptions, emails and memos will be destroyed.

(Answer any questions. Have students sign and turn in assent forms before continuing)

Prior to this focus group, you and about 200 other students completed an online survey that asked you to respond to questions and statements about your general classroom learning experiences. Students of all races and ethnicities were invited to take part in the survey and here are a few of the preliminary findings.

[Flip chart]

Percentage of each racial and ethnic group that reported negative classroom learning experiences.

Percentage of each racial and ethnic group that reported their classroom learning experiences impact/ impacted their academic achievement.

Questions:

What are your thoughts/ questions?

Do these percentages surprise you?

Do these results accurately depict your classroom learning experiences?

What have your classroom learning experiences been?

How have these experiences impacted your academic achievement?

How important is it that your teacher calls on you?

High School Focus Group

The purpose of this focus group is to hear directly from you, students, about your classroom learning experience.

As we get into the discussion think about your classroom experiences from the first day you started school to now.

Before we start our conversation, here are 3 agreements we need to uphold:

- Speak loud and proud
- Speak one at a time (because I am audio recording and want to be sure I hear clearly)
- Confidentiality (no names, what is said in here stays in here)

A little bit about myself and my research:

- I am a parent

- I have been teaching for 16years
- I am working on PhD (with plans to graduate in May)

My study focuses on the classroom learning experiences of students because there is an achievement gap between students based on race that everyone talks about and no one has been able to “fix.” *Show image

I did a lot of research to try to understand why the achievement gap is not “fixed” yet. What I found was troubling:

- Most of the research blames teachers, students or families
- Some of the research offers suggestions that include more money, longer school days and college degrees for all teachers
- Hardly any of the research included the experiences or opinions of students.

So I’d like to hear from you:

- What is it like being a student?
- What have your classroom learning experiences been like?
- Does race impact your learning experiences?

Last June I asked middle school students if they thought race impacted their classroom learning experiences and they were appalled: “no way, teachers can’t be racist!” “when I get in trouble its because I’m being too silly”

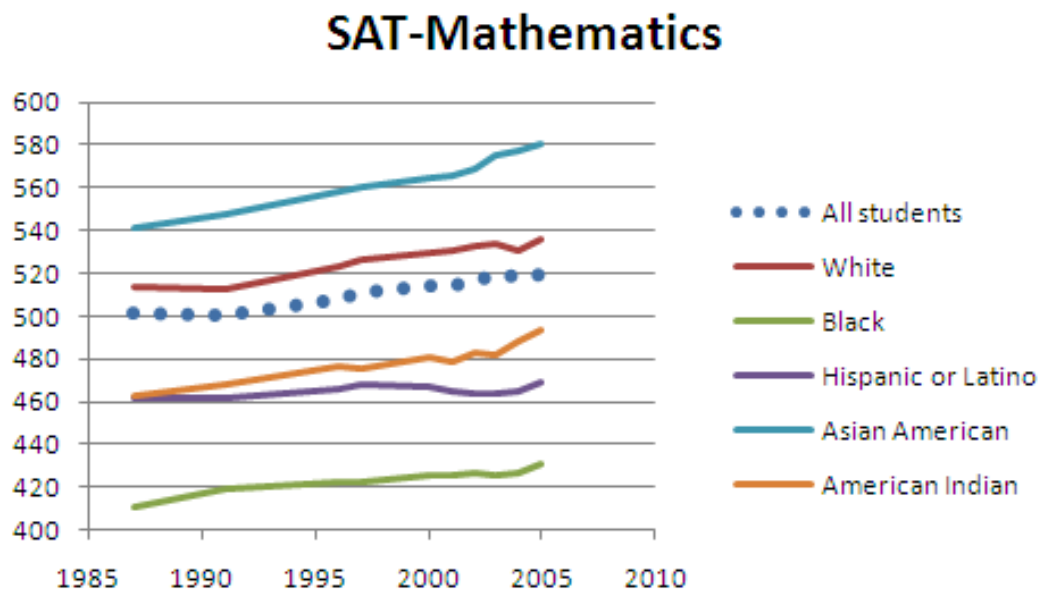
- What are your thoughts about their response?

Here is some of the data from a survey I gave students in middle and high school:

When asked _____students said _____

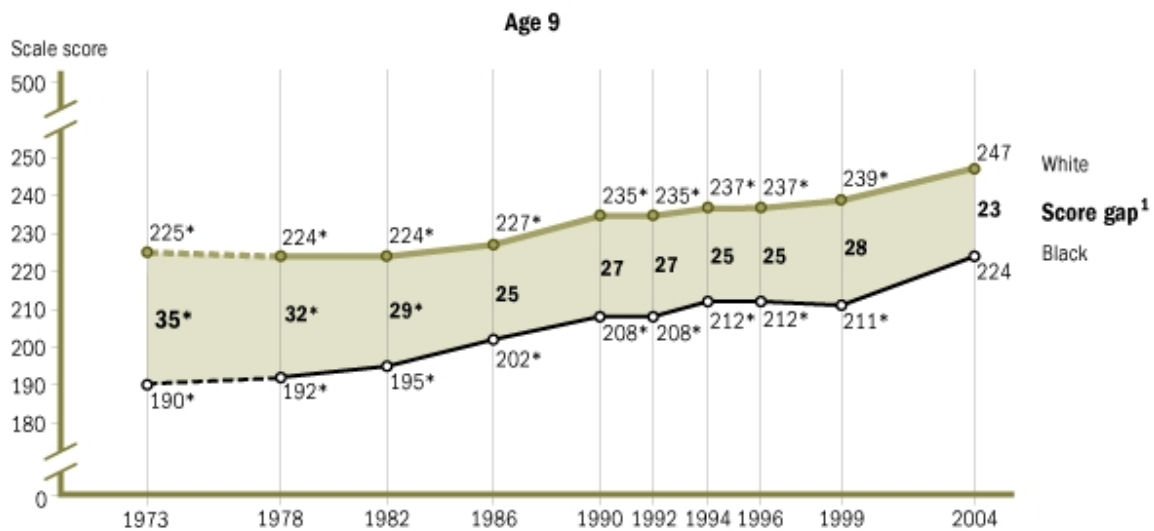
What are your thoughts?

APPENDIX G. ACHIEVEMENT GAP VISUALS
SHOWN TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5d/SAT-math-by-race-ethnicity.png>

NAEP trends in average mathematics scale scores and score gaps for White students and Black students, age 9: 1973–2004



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achievement_gap_in_the_United_States

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